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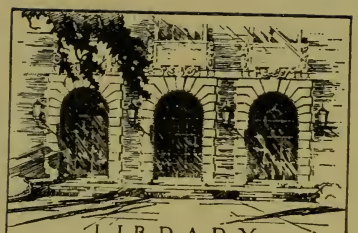

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THE

WILD HUNTRESS.

BY

CAPTAIN MAYNE REID,

AUTHOR OF "THE SCALP-HUNTERS," "THE WAR-TRAIL,"
ETC., ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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THE WILD HUNTRESS.

CHAPTER I.

ANOTHER DUEL DETERMINED ON.

Into my saddle—off out of the clearing—away through the dripping forest—on through the sweltering swamp, I hurried.

Up the creek was my route—my destination, the dwelling of the hunter, Wingrove. Surely, in such weather, I should find him at home?

It was natural I should seek the young backwoodsman. In such an emergency, I might count with certainty on having his advice and assistance.

True, I anticipated no great benefit from either: for what could either avail me? The

young man was helpless as myself; and had similarly suffered. This would secure me his sympathy; but what more could he give?

After all, I did not reckon it as nothing. The condolence of a friend or fellow-sufferer may soothe, though it cannot cure; and for such a solace the heart intuitively seeks. Confidence and sympathy are consolatory virtues—even penance has its purpose.

I longed, therefore, for a friend—one to whom I could confide my secret, and unbosom my sorrow; and I sought that friend in the young backwoodsman. I had a claim upon him: he had made me the confidant of *his* care—the recipient of his heart confessed. Little dreamed I at the time, I should so soon be calling upon him for a reciprocity of the kindness.

Fortune so far favoured me—I found him at home.

My arrival scarcely roused him from a dejection that, I could perceive, was habitual to him. I knew its cause; and could see that he was struggling against it—lest it

should hinder him from the fulfilment of his duties as a host. It did not.

There was something truly noble in this conquest of courtesy over the heart heavily laden—charged and engrossed with selfish care. Not without admiration did I observe the conflict.

I hesitated not to confide my secret to such a man : I felt convinced that under that buck-skin coat beat the heart of a gentleman.

I told him the whole story of my love—beginning with the hour in which I had left him.

The tale aroused him from his apathy—more especially the episode, which related to my first meeting with Lilian, and the encounter that followed. As a hunter, this last would have secured his attention ; but it was not altogether that. The scene touched a chord in unison with his own memories: for by some such incident had he first won the favour of Marian.

As I approached the *finale* of the duel scene—that point where the stranger had

appeared upon the stage—I could perceive the interest of my listener culminating to a pitch of excitement; and, before I had pronounced ten words in description of the clerical visitor, the young hunter sprang to his feet, exclaiming as he did so—

'Josh Stebbins!'

'Yes; it was he—I know it myself.'

I continued the narrative; but I saw that I was no longer listened to with attention. Wingrove was on his feet, and pacing the floor with nervous irregular strides. Every now and then, I saw him glance towards his rifle—that rested above the fireplace; while the angry flash of his eyes betokened that he was meditating some serious design.

As soon as I had described the winding up of the duel, and what followed—including my departure from Swampville—I was again interrupted by the young hunter—this time not by his speech, but by an action equally significant.

Hastily approaching the fireplace, he lifted his rifle from the cleets; and, dropping

the piece upon its butt, commenced loading it!

It was not the movement itself, so much as the time and manner, that arrested my attention; and these declared the object of the act. Neither for squirrel nor coon—deer, bear, nor panther—was that rifle being loaded!

'Where are you going?' I inquired, seeing that he had taken down his coon-skin cap, and slung on his pouch and powder-horn.

'Only a bit down the crik. You'll excuse me, stranger, for leavin' o' ye; but I'll be back in the twinklin' o' an eye. Thar's a bit o' dinner for ye, if you can eat cold deer-meat; an' you'll find somethin' in the old bottle thar. I won't be gone more'n a hour. *I—reckon* I won't.'

The emphasis expressed a certain indecision, which I observed without being able to interpret. I had my conjectures, however.

'Can I not go with you?' I asked, in hopes of drawing him to declare his design. 'The weather has cleared up; and I should prefer

riding out, to staying here alone. If it is not some business of a private nature'——

'Thar's nothin' partic'larly private about it, stranger; but it's a bizness I don't want you to be mixed up in. I guess ye've got yur own troubles now, 'ithout takin' share o' myen.'

'If it is not rude, may I ask the business on which you're going?'

'Welcome to know it, stranger. I'm a goin' *to kill Josh Stebbins!*'

'Kill Josh Stebbins?'

'Eyther that, or he shall kill me.'

'Oh! nonsense!' I exclaimed, surprised less at the intention—which I had already half divined—than at the cool determined tone in which it was declared.

'I've said it, stranger! I've sworn it over an' over, an' it shell be done. 'Taint no new notion I've tuk. I'd detarmined on makin' him fight long ago: for I'd an old score to settle wi' him, afore that 'un you know o'; but I niver ked got the skunk to stan' up. He allers tuk care to keep out o' my way.

Now I've made up my mind he don't dodge me any longer; an', by the Etarnal! if that black-hearted snake's to be foun' in the settlement'——

'He is not to be found in the settlement.'

'Not to be foun' in the settlement!' echoed the hunter, in a tone that betrayed both surprise and vexation—'not to be foun' in the settlement? Surely you ain't in earnest, stranger? You seed him the day afore yesterday!'

'True—but I have reason to think he is gone.'

'God forbid! But you ain't sure o' it? What makes you think he air gone?'

'Too sure of it—it was that knowledge that brought me in such haste to your cabin.'

I detailed the events of the morning, which Wingrove had not yet heard; my brief interview with the Indian maiden—her figurative prophecy that had proved but too truthful. I described the deserted dwelling; and at last read to him the letter of Lilian—read it from beginning to end.

He listened with attention, though chafing at the delay. Once or twice only did he interrupt me, with the simple expression—'Poor little Lil!'

'Poor little Lil!' repeated he when I had finished. 'She too gone wi' him!—just as Marian went six months ago! No—no!' he exclaimed, correcting himself, in a voice that proclaimed the agony of his thoughts. 'No! it war different—altogether different: *Marian went willin'ly.*'

'How know you that?' I said, with a half-conceived hope of consoling him.

'Know it? O stranger! I'm sure o' it; Su-wa-nee sayed so.'

'That signifies nothing. It is not the truer of her having said so. A jealous and spiteful rival. Perhaps the very contrary is the truth? Perhaps Marian was forced to marry this man? Her father may have influenced her: and it is not at all unlikely, since he appears to be himself under some singular influence—as if in dread of his saintly son-in-law. I noticed some circumstances that would lead one to this conclusion.'

'Thank ye, stranger, for them words!' cried the young hunter, rushing forward, and grasping me eagerly by the hand. 'It's the first bit o' comfort I've had since Marian war tuk away! I've heerd myself that Holt war afeerd o' Stebbins; an' maybe that snake in the grass had a coil about him somehow. I confess ye, it often puzzled me, Marian's takin' it so to heart, an' all about a bit o' a kiss—which I wudn't a tuk if the Indiun hadn't poked her lips clost up to myen. Lord o' mercy! I'd gie all I've got in the world, to think it war true as you've sayed.'

'I have very little doubt of its being true. I have now seen your rival; and I think it altogether improbable she would, of her own free will, have preferred him to you.'

'Thank ye, stranger! it's kind in you to say so. She's now married an' gone: but if I thort thar had been *force* used, I'd 'a done long ago *what I mean to do now.*'

'What is that?' I asked, struck by the emphatic energy with which the last words were spoken.

'Foller *him*, if't be to the furrest eend o' the world! Yes, stranger! I mean it. I'll go arter him, an' track him out. I'll find him in the bottom o' a Californey gold mine, or wherever he may try to hide hisself; an', by the Etarnal! I'll wipe out the score—both the old un an' the new un—in the skunk's blood, or I'll never set fut agin in the state o' Tennessee. I've made up my mind to it.'

'You are determined to follow him?'

'Firmly detarmined!'

'Enough! Our roads lie together!'

CHAPTER II.

A DEPARTURE IN A 'DUG-OUT.'

We were in perfect accord as to our course of action, as in our thoughts. If our motives were not similar, our enemy was the same. Only was there a difference in our prospective designs. Love was the lure that beckoned me on; Wingrove was led by revenge. To follow *him*, and punish guilt, was the *métier* of my companion; to follow *her*, and rescue innocence, was the *role* cast for me. Though guided by two such different passions, both were of the strongest of our nature—either sufficient to stimulate to the most earnest action; and without loss of time, we entered upon it in full determination to succeed.

I had already formed the design of pursuit; and perhaps it was with the hope of obtaining an associate and companion, that I had sought an interview with the hunter. At all events, this had been my leading idea. His expressed determination, therefore, was but the echo of my wish. It only remained for us to mould our design into a proper and practicable form.

Though not much older than my new comrade, there were some things in which I had the advantage of him. I was his superior in experience. He acknowledged it with all deference, and permitted my counsels to take the lead.

The exercise of partisan warfare—especially that practised on the Mexican and Indian frontiers—is a school scarcely equalled for training the mind to coolness and self-reliance. An experience thus obtained, had given mine such a cast; and taught me, by many a well-remembered lesson, the truthfulness of that wise saw: 'The more haste the less speed.'

Instead, therefore of rushing at once *in medias res*, and starting forth, without know-

ing whither to go, my counsel was that we should act with caution, and adopt some definite plan of pursuit.

It was not the suggestion of my heart, but rather of my head. Had I obeyed the promptings of the former, I should have been in the saddle, hours before, and galloping somewhere in a westerly direction—perhaps to find, at the end of a long journey, only disappointment, and the infallibility of the adage.

Taking counsel from my reason, I advised a different course of action; and my comrade —whose head for his age was a cool one— agreed to follow my advice. Indeed, he had far less motive for haste than I. Revenge would keep, and could be slept upon; while with emotions such as mine, a quiet heart was out of the question. She whom I loved was not only in danger of being lost to me for ever, but in danger of becoming the victim of a dastard *coquin*—diabolic as dastard!

Suffering under the sting of such a fearful apprehension, it required me to exert all the self-restraining power of which I was pos-

sessed. Had I but known *where to go*, I should have rushed to horse, and ridden on upon the instant. Not knowing, I was fortunately possessed of sufficient prudence to restrain me from the idle attempt.

That Holt and his daughter were gone, and in company with the Mormon, we knew: the letter told that. That they had left the cabin, was equally known; but whether they were yet clear off from the neighbourhood, was still uncertain; and to ascertain this was the first thing to be accomplished. If still within the boundaries of the settlement, or upon any of the roads leading from it, there would be a chance of *overtaking* them. But what after that? Ah! beyond that I did not trust myself to speculate. I dared not discuss the future. I refrained from casting even a glance into its horoscope—so dark did it appear.

I had but little hope that they were anywhere within reach. That phrase of fatal prophecy, 'You will be too late—too late!' still rang in my ears. It had a fuller meaning than might appear from a hasty interpretation

of it. Had not it also a figurative application? and did it not signify I should be too late *in every sense?* * * * *

At what time had they taken their departure? By what route? and upon what road?

These were the points to be ascertained; and our only hope of obtaining a clue to them was by proceeding to the place of departure itself—the deserted dwelling.

Thither we hied in all haste—prepared, if need be, for a more distant expedition.

On entering the enclosure, we dismounted, and at once set about examining the 'sign.' My companion passed to and fro, like a pointer in pursuit of a partridge.

I had hoped we might trace them by the tracks; but this hope was abandoned, on perceiving that the rain had obliterated every index of the kind. Even the hoof-prints of my own horse—made but an hour before—were washed full of mud, and scarcely traceable.

Had they gone upon horseback? It was

not probable: the house-utensils could hardly have been transported that way? Nor yet could they have removed them in a wagon? No road for wheels ran within miles of the clearing — that to Swampville, as already stated, being no more than a bridle-path; while the other 'traces,' leading up and down the creek, were equally unavailable for the passage of a wheeled vehicle.

There was but one conclusion to which we could come; and indeed we arrived at it without much delay: they had gone off in a canoe.

It was clear as words or eye-witnesses could have made it. Wingrove well knew the craft. It was known as Holt's 'dug-out;' and was occasionally used as a ferry-boat, to transport across the creek such stray travellers as passed that way. It was sufficiently large to carry several at once—large enough for the purpose of a removal.

The mode of their departure was the worst feature in the case; for, although we had been already suspecting it, we had still some doubts.

Had they gone off in any other way, there would have been a possibility of tracking them. But a *congé* in a canoe was a very different affair: man's presence leaves no token upon the water: like a bubble or a drop of rain, his traces vanish from the surface, or sink into the depths of the subtle element—an emblem of his own vain nothingness!

CHAPTER III.

A DANGEROUS SWEETHEART.

Our conjectures as to the mode of their departure were at an end. On this point, we had arrived at a definite knowledge. It was clear they had gone off in the canoe; and with the current, of course: since that would carry them in the direction they intended to travel.

The settling of this question produced a climax—a momentary pause in our action.

We stood upon the bank of the stream, bending our eyes upon its course, and for a time giving way to the most gloomy reflections. Like our thoughts were the waters

troubled. Swollen by the recent rain-storm, the stream no longer preserved its crystal purity; but in the hue of its waters justified the name it bore. Brown and turbid, they rolled past—no longer a stream, but a rushing torrent—that spumed against the banks, as it surged impetuously onward. Trees torn up by the roots were carried on by the current—their huge trunks and half-riven branches twisting and wriggling in the stream, like drowning giants in their death-struggle. In the 'sough' of the torrent, we heard their sighs—in its roar, the groans of their departing spirits!

The scene was in unison with our thoughts; and equally so with the laughter that at that moment sounded in our ears—for it was laughter wild and maniac. It was heard in the forest behind us; ringing among the trees, and mingling its shrill unearthly echo with the roaring of the torrent.

Both of us were startled at the sound. Though the voice was a woman's, I could see that it had produced on Wingrove a certain

impression of fear. On hearing it, he trembled and turned pale.

I needed no explanation. A glance towards the forest revealed the cause. A female form moving among the trees told me whence had come that unexpected and ill-timed cachinnation.

'Lord o' mercy!' exclaimed my companion, 'that Injun again! She 's been arter me since that night, an' threatens to have a fresh try at takin' my life. Look out, stranger! I know she's got pistols.'

'Oh! I fancy there's not much danger. She appears to be in the laughing mood.'

'It's jest that ere larf I don't like: she's allers wust when she's in that way.'

By this time the Indian had reached the edge of the clearing, very near the rear of the cabin. Without pausing, she sprang up on the fence—as if to enter the enclosure. This, however, proved not to be her intention; for, on climbing to the topmost rail, she stood erect upon it, with one hand clutching the limb of a tree, to keep her in position.

As soon as she had attained the upright attitude, another peal of laughter came ringing from her lips, as wild as that with which she had announced her approach; but there was also in its tones a certain modulation that betokened scorn!

Neither of us uttered a syllable; but, observing a profound silence, stood waiting to hear what she had to say.

Another scornful laugh, and her words broke forth:

'White Eagle! and proud slayer of red panthers! your hearts are troubled as the stream on which your eyes are gazing! Suwa-nee knows your sorrows. She comes to you with words of comfort!'

'Ah! speak them then!' said I, suddenly conceiving a hope.

'Hear you that sound in the forest?'

We heard no sound, save that of the water grumbling and surging at our feet. We answered in the negative.

'You hear it not? Ha, ha, ha! where are your ears? It is ringing in mine. All

day I have heard it. Listen! there it is again!'

'She's a mockin' us,' muttered my companion; 'thar ain't no soun' in partickler.'

'No! we cannot hear it; you are mocking us,' I rejoined, addressing myself to the brown-skinned sibyl.

'Ha! ha! ha! It is *it* that is mocking you. It mocks you, and yet it is not the mocking-bird. It is not the dove cooing gently to his mate, nor the screaming of the owl. It is the cuckoo that mocks you! ha! ha! the cuckoo! Now, do you hear it, White Eagle? Do *you* hear it, proud slayer of red panthers? Ha! it mocks you both!'

'Oh! bother, girl!' exclaimed Wingrove in a vexed tone; 'ye're a talkin' nonsense.'

'Truth, White Eagle—truth! the black snake has been in your nest; and yours, too, slayer of panthers! He has wound himself around your pretty birds, and borne them away in his coils—away over the great desert plains—away to the Big Lake! Ha, ha, ha! In the desert, he will defile them; in the

waters of the lake, he will drown them—ha, ha, ha!'

'Them's yur words o' comfort, air they?' cried Wingrove, exasperated to a pitch of fury. 'Durned if I'll bar sech talk! I won't stan' it any longer. Clar out now! We want no croakin' raven hyar. Clar out! or '——

He was not permitted to finish the threat. I saw the girl suddenly drop down from her position on the fence, and glide behind the trunk of a tree. Almost at the same instant a light gleamed along the bark—which might have been mistaken for a flash of lightning, had it not been followed instantaneously by a quick crack—easily recognisable as the report of a pistol!

I waited not to witness the effect; but rushed towards the tree—with the design of intercepting the Indian.

The blue smoke lingering in the damp air, hindered me from seeing the movements of the girl; but, hurrying onward, I clambered over the fence.

Once on the other side, I was beyond the

cloud, and could command a view for a score of yards or so around me; but, in that circuit, no human form was to be seen!

Beyond it, however, I heard the vengeful, scornful laugh, pealing its unearthly echoes through the columned aisles of the forest!

CHAPTER IV.

THE HOROLOGE OF THE DEAD HORSE.

With inquiring eye and anxious heart, I turned towards the spot where I had left my companion.

To my joy, he was still upon his feet, and coming towards me. I could see blood dripping from his fingers, and a crimson-stained rent in the sleeve of his buckskin shirt; but the careless air with which he was regarding it, at once set my mind at rest. He was smiling: there could not be much danger in the wound?

It proved so in effect. The bullet had passed through the muscular part of the left forearm—only tearing the flesh. The wound

did not even require a surgeon. The hemorrhage once checked, the dressing which my experience enabled me to give it was sufficient; and kept slung a few days, it would be certain to heal.

Unpleasant as was the incident, it seemed to affect my companion far less than the words that preceded it. The allegorical allusions were but too well understood; and though they added but little to the knowledge already in his possession, that little produced a renewed acerbity of spirit.

It affected me equally with my comrade—perhaps more. The figurative revelations of the Indian had put a still darker phase on the affair. The letter of Lilian spoke only of a far country, where gold was dug out of the sand—California, of course. There was no allusion to the Salt Lake—not one word about a migration to the metropolis of the Mormons. Su-wa-nee's speech, on the other hand, clearly alluded to this place as the goal of the squatter's journey!

How her information could have been

obtained, or whence derived, was a mystery; and, though loath to regard it as oracular, I could not divest myself of a certain degree of conviction that her words were true. The mind, ever prone to give assent to information conveyed by hints and innuendos, too often magnifies this gipsy knowledge; and dwells not upon the means by which it may have been acquired. For this reason gave I weight to the warnings of the brown-skinned sibyl—though uttered only to taunt, and too late to be of service.

The incident altered our design—only so far as to urge us to its more rapid execution; and, without losing time, we turned our attention once more to the pursuit of the fugitives.

The first point to be ascertained was the *time* of their departure.

'If it wan't for the rain,' said the hunter, 'I ked a told it by thar tracks. They must a made some hyar in the mud, while toatin' thar things to the dug-out. The durned rain's washed 'em out—every footmark o' 'em.'

'But the horses? what of them? They could not have gone off in the canoe?'

'I war just thinkin' o' them. The one you seed with Stebbins must a been hired, I reck'n; an' from Kipp's stables. Belike enuf, the skunk tuk him back the same night, and then come agin 'ithout him; or Kipp might a sent a nigger to fetch him?'

'But Holt's own horse—the old "critter," as you call him?'

'That *diz* need explainin'. He *must* a left him ahind. He culdn't a tuk *him* in the *dug-out*; besides, he wan't worth takin along. The old thing war clean wore out, an' wuldn't a sold for his weight in corn-shucks. Now, what ked they a done wi' him?'

The speaker cast a glance around, as if seeking for an answer.

'Heigh!' he exclaimed, pointing to some object, on which he had fixed his glance. 'Yonder we'll find *him!* See the buzzarts! The old hoss's past prayin' for, I'll be boun'.'

It was as the hunter had conjectured. A little outside the enclosure, several vultures

were seen upon the trees, perched upon the lowest branches, and evidently collected there by some object on the ground.

On approaching the spot, the birds flew off with reluctance; and the old horse was seen lying among the weeds, under the shadow of a gigantic sycamore. He was quite dead, though still wearing his skin; and a broad red disc in the dust, opposite a gaping wound in the animal's throat, showed that he had been slaughtered where he lay!

'He's killed the critter!' musingly remarked my companion as he pointed to the gash; 'jest like what he'd do! He might a left the old thing to some o' his neighbors, for all he war worth; but it wudn't a been Hick Holt to a did it. He wan't partickler friendly wi' any o' us, an' least o' all wi' myself—tho' I niver knew the adzact reezun o't, 'ceptin' that I beat him once shootin' at a *barbecue*. He war mighty proud o' his shootin', an' that riled him, I reck'n: he's been ugly wi' me iver since.'

I scarcely heeded what the young hunter

was saying—my attention being occupied with a process of analytical reasoning. In the dead horse, I had found a key to the time of Holt's departure.

The ground for some distance around where the carcass lay was quite dry: the rain having been screened off by a large spreading branch of the sycamore, that extended its leafy protection over the spot. Thus sheltered, the body lay just as it had fallen; and the crimson rivulet, with its terminating 'pool,' had only been slightly disturbed by the feet of the buzzards—the marks of whose claws were traceable in the red mud, as was that of their beaks upon the eyeballs of the animal.

All these were signs, which the experience of a prairie campaign had taught me how to interpret; and which the forest lore of my backwoods comrade also enabled him to read. At the first question put to him, he comprehended my meaning.

'How long think you since he was killed?' I asked, pointing to the dead horse.

'Ha! ye're right, stranger!' said he, perceiving the object of the interrogatory. 'I war slack not to think o' that. We kin easy find out, I reck'n.'

The hunter bent down over the carcass, so as to bring his eyes close to the red gash in the neck. In this he placed the tips of his fingers, and kept them there. He uttered not a word, but held his head slantwise and steadfast, as if listening.

Only for a few seconds did he remain in this attitude; and then, as if suddenly satisfied with the examination, he rose from his stooping posture, exclaiming as he stood erect:

'Good, by thunder! The old horse hain't been dead 'bove a kupple o' hours. Look thar, stranger! the blood ain't froze? I kin a'most fancy thar's heat in his old karkiss yet!'

'You are sure he has been killed this moring?'

'Quite sure o't; an' at most three, or may be four hour agone. See thar!' he continued, raising one of the limbs, and letting it drop

again; 'limber as a eel! Ef he'd a been dead last night, the leg'd been stiff long afore this.'

'Quite true,' replied I, convinced, as was my companion, that the horse had been slaughtered that morning.

This bit of knowledge was an important contribution towards fixing the time of the departure. It told the *day*. The hour was of less importance to our plans; though to that, by a further process of reasoning, we were enabled to make a very near approximation.

Holt must have killed the horse before going off; and the act, as both of us believed, could not have been accomplished at a very early hour. As far as the sign enabled us to tell, not more than four hours ago; and perhaps about two, before the time of my first arrival in the clearing.

Whether the squatter had left the ground immediately after the performance of this rude sacrifice, it was impossible to tell. There was no sign by which to determine the point; but the probability was, that the deed was done

just upon the eve of departure; and that the slaughter of the old horse was the closing act of Holt's career, in his clearing upon Mud Creek.

Only one doubt remained. Was it he who had killed the animal?

I had conceived a suspicion pointing to Su-wa-nee—but without being able to attribute to the Indian any motive for the act.

'No, no!' replied my comrade, in answer to my interrogatory on this head: ''twar Holt hisself, sartin. He culdn't take the old hoss along wi' him, an' he didn't want anybody else to git him. Besides, the girl hedn't no reezun to a dit it. She'd a been more likely to a tuk the old critter to thar camp—seein' he war left behind wi' nobody to own him. Tho' he wan't worth more'n what the skin 'ud fetch, he'd a done them ar Injuns well enuf, for carryin' thar traps an' things. No, 'twan't her, nor anybody else 'ceptin' Holt hisself—he did it.'

'If that be so, comrade, there is still hope for us. They cannot have more than four

hours the start. You say the creek has a winding course?

'Crooked as a coon's hind leg.'

'And the Obion?'

'Most part the same. It curls through the bottom like the tail o' a cur-dog; an' nigher the Massissippy, it don't move faster than a snail 'ud crawl. I reck'n the run o' the river 'll not help 'em much. They'll hev a good spell o' paddlin afore they git down to Massissippy; an' I hope that durned Mormon 'll blister his ugly claws at it!'

'With all my heart!' I rejoined; and both of us at the same instant recognising the necessity of taking time by the forelock, we hurried back to our horses, sprang into our saddles and started along the trace conducting to the mouth of the Obion.

CHAPTER V.

A LOOK-OUT FROM ALOFT.

It cost us a fatiguing ride of nearly twelve hours' duration—most of it along by-roads and bridle-paths—at intervals passing through tracts of swampy soil, where our horses sank to the saddle-girths in mud.

We rode continuously: stopping only once to recruit our horses at one of the 'stands,' or isolated log hostelries—which are found upon the old 'traces' connecting the sparse settlements of the backwoods. It was the only one we saw upon our route; and at it we remained no longer than was absolutely necessary to rest our wearied steeds, and put them in a condition for the completion of the journey.

We knew the necessity of haste. Our only hope lay in being able to reach the mouth of the Obion before the canoe could pass out of it. Otherwise, our journey would be in vain; and we should not only have our long ride for nothing, but would be under the necessity of doubling the distance by riding back again.

Along the route we found time to discuss the circumstances—both those in our favour and against us. The water-way taken by the canoe was far from being direct. Both the creek and the larger stream curved repeatedly in their courses; and in ordinary times were of sluggish current. The freshet, however, produced by the late rain-storm, had rendered it swifter than common; and we knew that the canoe would be carried down with considerable rapidity—faster than we were travelling on horseback.

On such roads, and for so great a distance, fast travelling was impossible; and could only have been accomplished at the risk of killing our horses. Mounted as I was, I might have made more of the time; but I was under the

necessity of slackening pace for my companion —whose sorry steed constantly required waiting for.

Our sole chance lay in our route being shorter, and in the circumstance that the fugitives had not a very long start of us; but for all this, the issue was exceedingly doubtful; and by the nicest calculations, we were satisfied we should have but little margin to spare.

I need hardly point out the importance of our arriving in time. Should the canoe get beyond the mouth of the Obion—without our seeing it—we should be left undetermined as to whether they had gone *up* the Mississippi or *down*; and therefore altogether without a guide as to our future movements. In fact, we should be unable to proceed further in the pursuit.

So far as the mouth of the Obion, their route was fixed; and of course ours was also determined. But beyond, it would be on our part mere blind guessing; and, should evil chance conduct us in the wrong direction, the result would be ruin to our prospects.

On the other hand, could we but arrive in time—if only to see the canoe entering the great river—and note which turning it took —our purpose would be accomplished. That is, our *present* purpose; for beyond that of ascertaining their route of travel across the plains, and their point of destination, I had formed no plans. To follow them wherever they might go—even to the distant shores of the Pacific—to seek them wherever they might settle—to settle beside them—beside *her*—these were the ideas I had as yet but vaguely conceived. All ulterior designs were contingent on the carrying out of these, and still shrouded under the cloudy drapery of the ambiguous future.

The purposes of my travelling-companion differed slightly from mine, and were, perhaps, a little more definite. His leading idea was a settlement of old scores with Stebbins, for wrongs done to him—which he now more particularly detailed to me. They were sufficiently provocative of revenge; and, from the manner of my comrade, and the vows he oc-

casionally uttered, I could perceive that he would be as eager in the pursuit as myself. In all probability, an encounter with the migrating party would bring about an important change in their programme: since the young hunter was determined, as he expressed himself, 'to force the durned skunk into a fight.'

Inspired by such motives, we pressed on to the end of our journey; and reached the mouth of the Obion, after a long and wearisome ride.

It was midnight when we arrived upon the shore of the Mississippi—at its point of confluence with the Tennessean stream. The land upon which we stood was scarcely elevated above the surface of the water; and covered, every foot of it, with a forest of the cotton-wood poplar, and other water-loving trees. These extending along the marshy borders of both streams, hindered us from having a view of their channels. To obtain this, it was necessary to climb one of the trees; and my comrade being disabled, the task devolved upon me.

Dismounting, I chose one that appeared easiest of ascent; and, clambering up it as high as I could get, I fixed myself in a fork, and commenced duty as a vidette.

My position could not have been better chosen. It afforded me a full view, not only of the Obion's mouth, but also of the broad channel into which it emptied—at their confluence, forming an expanse of water that, but for its rolling current, might have been likened to a vast lake.

There was moonlight over the whole surface; and the erratic ripples were reflected in sparkling coruscations—scarcely to be distinguished from the gleaming of the 'lightning bugs,' that hovered in myriads along the edges of the marsh.

Both banks of the lesser stream were draped to the water's edge with an unbroken forest of cotton-woods—the tops of which, exhibiting their characteristic softness of outline, were unstirred by the slightest breeze. Between rolled the brown waters of the Obion, in ruder, grander flow, and with channel extended by

the freshet. Every inch of it, from side to side, was under my observation—so completely, that I could distinguish the smallest object that might have appeared upon its surface. Not even the tiniest waif could have escaped me—much less a canoe freighted with human beings; and containing that fairer form, that would be certain to secure the keenest and most eager glances of my eye.

I congratulated myself on reaching this perch. I perceived that a better post of observation could not have been chosen. It was complete for the purpose; and, if I could only have felt sure that we had arrived in time, all would have been satisfactory.

Time alone would determine the point; and, turning my eyes up stream, I entered upon my earnest vigil.

CHAPTER VI.

THE WHITE FOG.

Vain vigil it proved. I shall not tire the reader with details. Suffice it to say, that we kept watch till morning's dawn; and then, profiting by the day-light, sought out a more convenient post of observation, where we continued our surveillance—watching and sleeping in turn.

Throughout the following day, and into the second, was our vigil extended: until, no longer able to hope against hope, we agreed finally to abandon it.

But for one circumstance, we might have felt surprise at the result. We were both convinced that we had reached the river's mouth

in good time: since, by our calculations, the canoe could not possibly have 'headed' us. But for the same circumstance, we might have believed, that they had not yet come down the Obion; and perhaps would have remained at our post a day longer.

The explanation is this: On the first night of our watch, a few hours after having taken my station in the tree, a fog had suddenly arisen upon the rivers, shrouding the channels of both. It was the *white fog*—a well-known phenomenon of the Mississippi—that often extends its dangerous drapery over the bosom of the 'Father of Waters:' a thing of dread, even to the skilled pilots who navigate this mighty stream.

On that particular night, the fog lay low upon the water: so that in my position near the top of the tree I was entirely clear of its vapoury disc; and could look down upon its soft filmy cumuli floating gently over the surface—white and luminous under the silvery moonlight. The moon was still shining brightly; and both sky and forest could be

seen as clearly as ever. The water-surface alone was hidden from my sight—the very thing I was most anxious to observe.

As if by some envious demon of the flood, this curtain seemed to have been drawn: for, just as the fog had fairly unfurled itself, I fancied I could hear the dipping of a paddle at no great distance off in the channel of the stream. Moreover, gazing intently into the mist—as yet thin and filmy—I fancied I saw a long dark object upon the surface, with the silhouettes of human forms outlined above it —just as of a canoe *en profile* with passengers in it. I even noted the number of the upright forms: three of them—which exactly corresponded to that of the party we were expecting.

So certain was I, at the moment, of seeing all this, that I need not have shouted to assure myself. Excited with over-eagerness, I did so; and hailed the canoe in hopes of obtaining an answer.

My summons produced not the desired effect. On the contrary, it seemed to still the

slight plashing I had heard; and, before the echoes of my voice died upon the air, the dark objects had glided out of sight—having passed under thick masses of the floating vapour.

Over and over, I repeated my summons—each time changing the form of speech, and each time with like fruitless effect!

The only answer I received was from the blue heron, that, startled by my shouts, rose screaming out of the fog, and flapped her broad wings close to my perch upon the tree.

Whether the forms I had seen were real—or only apparitions conjured up by my excited brain—they vouchsafed no reply; and, in truth, in the very next moment, I inclined to the belief that my senses had been deceiving me!

From that time, my comrade and I were uncertain; and this uncertainty will explain the absence of our surprise at not seeing the canoe, and why we waited no longer for its coming.

The most probable conjectures were that it had passed us in the fog; that the apparition

was real; and that they who occupied the canoe were now far away on the Mississippi—no longer trusting to such a frail craft, but passengers on one of the numerous steamboats, that by night as by day, and in opposite directions, we had seen passing the mouth of the Obion.

In all likelihood, then, the fugitives were now beyond the limits of Tennessee; and we felt sufficiently assured of this. But the more important point remained undetermined—whether they had gone northward or southward—whether by the routes of the Missouri or those of the Arkansas? Upon this question we were undecided as ever.

At that season of the year, the probabilities were in favour of the southern route; but it depended on whether the emigrants intended to proceed at once across the plains, or wait for the return of spring. I knew, moreover, that the Mormons had their own 'trains,' and ways of travelling; and that several new routes or 'trails' had been discovered during the preceding year, by military explorers,

emigrants for Oregon and California, and by the Mormons themselves. This knowledge only complicated the question, leaving us in hopeless doubt and indecision.

Thus unresolved, it would have been absurd to proceed further. Our only hope lay in returning to Swampville.

And whence this hope? What was to be expected in Swampville? Who was there in that village of golden dreams to guide me upon the track of my lost love?

No one—no human being. The index of my expectation was not a living thing, but a *letter!*

Assuredly, I had not forgotten that promise, so simply yet sweetly expressed: 'If I thought you would like to know where we are gone, I would write to you;' and again: 'If you will allow me, I will send a letter to Swampville, *from the first place we come to*, to tell you where we are going.'

Oh! that I could have told her how much I 'would like to know,' and how freely she had my permission to write! Alas! that was

impossible. But the contingencies troubled me not much: I was full of hope that she would waive them.

Communicating this hope to my companion, we rode back to Swampville: with the design of laying siege to the post-office, until it should surrender up to us the promised epistle.

CHAPTER VII.

THE PROMISED EPISTLE.

UNDER any circumstances, a return to Swampville would have been necessary: certain pecuniary requirements called me back to that interesting village.

A journey, even across the desert, cannot be made without money; and the hundred dollars I had paid to Holt, with hotel and other incidental outlays, had left me with a very light purse. It would have taken three times as much as I was master of, to provide us with the scantiest equipment required for a prairie journey; and toward this the young hunter, willing to give his all, was able to contribute nothing. He would cheerfully

have parted with his patrimony—as I with my purchase—for a very slender consideration; but, at that crisis, the Californian speculation demanded all the specie in circulation; and neither his clearing nor mine would have sold for a single dollar, had the payment been required in cash. A credit sale could not serve us in any way; and we were forced to hold on to our depreciated property—upon which not a single cent could be borrowed.

Never stood I in more need of my Nashville friend; and my appeal, already made, was promptly responded to—as I expected it would be. On the third day after my despatch, the answer arrived—with a handsome enclosure; enough to carry us across the continent, and back again if need be.

We were now ready for the road. We waited only for that other letter, that was to be the index to our destination.

How we passed our time during that interval of expectation is not worth describing. We enjoyed the hospitality of the Jackson hotel; and continued to escape the *espiéglerie*

of its husband-hunting denizens, by hunting the deer of the surrounding forest.

During the whole time, we went not near our respective 'plantations' on Mud Creek. Wingrove had good reason for being shy of that quarter; and I had no inclination to trust myself to its souvenirs. Moreover, the hours of the mail-rider were neither fixed nor regular; and on this account I avoided a prolonged absence from the post-office.

Six days of this expectancy I endured—six days of alternate hope and doubt—the latter at times so distressing, that even in the excitement of the chase I could not procure distraction for my thoughts!

More than once my comrade and I had almost ceased to hope; and half resolved to launch ourselves on the great prairie ocean—trusting to chance to gide us to the haven of our hopes.

On the sixth day we had determined upon it; and only awaited the mail, that should arrive on the morning of the seventh.

The seventh proved the day of joy. Our

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doubts were dispelled. The cloud that hung over our course was cleared away, by the arrival of the expected epistle!

My fingers trembled as I took the precious billet from the hands of the postmaster. He must have observed my emotion—though I did not open the letter in his presence. The superscription was enough to tell me from whom it came. I had studied the fac-simile of that pretty cipher, till it was well impressed upon my memory; and could therefore recognise it at a glance.

I did not even break open the envelope till we were upon the road. The post-mark, '*Van Buren, Arkansas*,' sufficiently indicated the direction we were to take; and not, till we had cleared the skirts of Swampville, and were *en route* for Memphis, did I enter on the pleasure of perusal.

The address was simply as before: 'To Edward Warfield;' and so to the apostrophic commencement: 'Stranger!'

I could have wished for some less distant word—some familiar phrase of endearment,

but I was contented—for I knew that Lilian's too recent love had lacked the opportunity of learning its language. Before it had time to achieve the employment of those sweet forms of speech, its course had been rudely interrupted.

Thus ran the letter:

'STRANGER!—I hope you got my other letter, and that you were able to read it, for I had no paper, nor pens, nor ink to write it better—only a little bit of a pencil, that was my mother's, and a leaf which father said you tore out of a book. But I think I could have wrote it better, only I was so afraid that they would see me, and scold me for it, and I wrote it in a great hurry, when they were from home, and then left it on the table after both of them had gone down to the creek to get into the canoe. I thought no one would come to the house before you, and I hoped all the morning you might come before we were gone. I would have given a great deal to have been able to see you again; and I think father would have waited till you came, only

his friend would not let him stay longer, but hurried us away. But I hope you got the letter, and that you will not be offended at me for writing this one I send you, without your leave. I promised that if you would allow me, I would write from some place, and tell you the name of the country where we are going; but I forgot that it would be impossible for you to give me leave, as you could not see me, nor yet know where to write it to me. I now know what country it is, for everybody we have seen is talking about it, and saying that it is full of gold, that lies on the ground in pieces as big as hickory nuts; and I hear the name a many a time, over and over again. Father calls it "Californey," and some "California," and this, I suppose, is the right way of spelling it. It is near a great sea, or ocean as they call it, which is not the same that comes in at Philadelphia and New York, but far greater and bigger than the Mississippi and the Obion, and all the rivers put together. It must be a very large sea to be bigger than the Mississippi! But I am sure you must know

all about it, for I have heard them say you have travelled in these far-away countries, and that you were an officer in the army, and had been fighting there with the Mexicans. I am glad you were not killed, and got safe home again to Tennessee; for if you had been killed, I should never have seen you; but now it is just as bad, if I am never to see you again. O sir! I would write to you from that country when we are settled there; but I fear you will forget me before then, and will not care to hear anything more about us.

'I shall never forget our dear Tennessee. I am very sorry at leaving it, and I am sure I can never be happy in California with all its gold—for what good can gold be to me? I should so like to hear sometimes from our old home, but father had no friends who could write to us: the only one we knew is gone away like ourselves.

'May be, sir, you would not mind writing to us—only a very short letter, to tell us how you get on with the clearing, and whether you have made it much bigger, and built a

great house upon it, as I have heard father say you intended to do. I shall always like to hear that you are in good health, and that you are happy.

'I have to tell you of a very strange thing that happened to us. At the mouth of the Obion river, when we were in the canoe at night-time—for we travelled all that night—we heard some one shouting to us, and O sir! it was so like your voice that I trembled when I heard it, for it appeared as if it came down out of the clouds. It was a thick mist, and we could see no one; but for all that, I would have cried out, but father would not let me speak. It appeared to be right above our heads; and father said it was some wood-cutters who had climbed into a tree. I suppose that must have been it; but it was as like your voice as if it had been you that shouted, and as I knew you could not be there, it made me wonder all the more.

'We arrived at this place yesterday. It is a large town on the Arkansas river: and we came to it in a steam-boat. From here we

are to travel in a waggon with a great many other people in what they call a "caravan," and they say we shall be many months in getting to the end of the journey. It is a long time to wait before I can write again, for there are no towns beyond Van Buren, and no post to carry a letter. But though I cannot write to you, I will not forget to think of the words you said to me, as I am now thinking of them every minute. In one of my mother's books which I brought with me, I have read a pretty piece. It is in poetry; and it is so like what I have been thinking of you, that I have learned it off by heart. It is so true-like and so pretty a piece that I thought you might like to read it, and hoping it may please you, I write it at the end of my letter, which I fear I have already made too long; but I hope you will have patience to read it all, and then read the poetry:—

'I think of thee when Morning springs
From sleep with plumage bathed in dew;
And like a young bird lifts her wings
Of gladness on the welkin blue.

And when at noon the breath of love
O'er flower and stream is wandering free,
And sent in music from the grove—
I think of thee—I think of thee!

'I think of thee, when soft and wide
The Evening spreads her robe of light,
And like a young and timid bride,
Sits blushing in the arms of Night.
And when the moon's sweet crescent springs
In light o'er heaven's deep, waveless sea,
And stars are forth like blessed things—
I think of thee—I think of thee!

'O sir! it is very, very true! I do think of you, and I am sure I shall do so as long as I live.

'Lilian Holt.'

Ah, Lilian! I too think of thee, and thy sweet song! Simple, but suggestive words! Knew I but where to address thee, you should soon know how responsive to them are the echoes of my heart!

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CARAVAN.

We rode on to Memphis as rapidly as our horses could travel—far too slow for our desires. Thence a steam-boat carried us to Little Rock, and another to Van Buren. Many days had been consumed while waiting for each boat—so many that, on arriving at Van Buren, we found that the caravan had the start of us by full two weeks!

Its probable route we ascertained without any difficulty—up along the Arkansas to the Rocky Mountains, through the valley of the Huerfano, and the passes Robideau and Coochetopa—thence across the head waters of

the Colorado, and by the old Spanish trail to California.

It was principally a caravan of gold-seekers: adventurers of all nations. Even Indians had gone with it—of the half-civilised tribes of the frontier—red and white equally tempted by the yellow attractions spread out for them in California. Though large, it wasw hat is termed a 'light train'—having more pack-animals than wagons. On this account, it would make way all the faster; and unless delayed by some accident, we might be a long time in coming up with it. It was not without a large measure of vexation that we learned how far it had got the start of us.

I should have submitted with less resignation to the necessary delays, but that my mind had been to some extent tranquillised by the contents of Lilian's letter. They had inclined me to the belief that the emigrants were simply *en route* for California—as was all the world just then—and that the Mormon was, after all, not so strong in his new faith as to resist the universal golden lure. His design

in taking the squatter with him might be merely of a secular character—having for its object the securing of a partner, in whose brawny arms the wash-pan and rocker might be handled to advantage.

That they whom we sought were gone with the caravan, we were soon satisfied. Holt was too marked a man to have escaped observation, even in a crowd of rough squatters like himself; but more than one eye had rested upon his fair daughter that longed to look upon her again. *Her* traces were easily told—as testified by the answers to my shy inquiries. Like some bright meteor, whose track across the heavens remains marked by its line of luminous phosphorescence, her radiant beauty was remembered. I needed not to inquire of her. Scarcely a coterie of which she was not the subject of conversation—to my infinite jealousy and chagrin. Not that aught was said of her, that should have given rise to such feelings: they were but the offspring of love's selfishness.

Not long had I to submit to such torture.

Our stay in Van Buren was of the shortest. In less than twenty hours after our arrival in the village, we took our departure from it—turning our faces towards the almost limitless wilderness of the west.

I had endeavoured to add to our company, but without success. The caravan had cleared Van Buren of its unemployed population; and not an idler remained—at least, not one who felt inclined to adventure with us. Even the needy 'loafer' could not be induced to try the trip—deeming ours too dangerous an expedition.

To say the least, it was reckless enough; but impelled by motives far more powerful than the thirst of gold, my comrade and I entered upon our journey, with scarce a thought about its perils.

The only addition to our company was a brace of stout pack-mules, that carried our provisions and other *impedimenta*; while the old horse of the hunter had been replaced by a more promising roadster.

It would be idle to detail the incidents of a

journey across the prairies. Ours differed in no way from hundreds of others that have been made, and described—except, perhaps, that after reaching the buffalo range, we travelled more by night than by day. We adopted this precaution simply to save our scalps—and along with them our lives—since the buffalo range—especially upon the Arkansas—is peculiarly the 'stamping' ground of the hostile savage. Here may be encountered the Pawnee and Comanche, the Kiowa and Cheyenne, the Waco and fierce Arapaho. Though continually engaged in internecine strife among themselves, all six tribes are equally enemies to the pale-faced intruders on their domain.

At this time they were said to be especially hostile—having been irritated by some late encounters with parties of ill-behaved emigrants. It was not without great peril, therefore, that we were passing through their territory; and what we had heard, before leaving Van Buren, had made us fully conscious of the risk we were running.

To meet with one of the hunting or war parties of these Indians, might not be certain death; but certain would they be to disarm and *dismount* us; and that, in the midst of the great prairie ocean, is a danger that often conducts to the same *dénouement*.

It was not preference, then, but precaution, that led us to adopt the 'secret system' of travelling by night.

Our usual plan was to lie by during the day, or for the greater part of it, concealed in some selected cover—either among rocks or copsewood. By stealing to a conspicuous eminence, we were enabled to view the route ahead of us, and map out our journey for the night. Upon this we would enter an hour or two before sundown: for then the Indian hunter has returned to his encampment, which can be easily avoided, by seeing its smoke from afar.

We often saw their smokes, and more than once the Indians themselves; but were never seen by them—so cautiously did we carry out our measures.

In this fashion we 'groped' our way with

considerable rapidity. Guided by the waggon tracks—especially when there was a moon—we could travel almost as fast as by daylight.

Only upon dark nights was our progress retarded; but, notwithstanding every impediment, we were enabled to travel faster than the caravan, and we knew that we were rapidly gaining upon it.

We could tell this by the constantly freshening trail; but we had a more accurate criterion in *the count of the camps*. By the number of these, we knew to a certainty that we were approaching the caravan.

We were in high hopes of being able to come up with it, before it should enter the mountain-passes—more dangerous to the traveller than even the plains themselves: because at that season more beset by bands of marauding savages.

Under the influence of these hopes, we were pressing forward, with all the haste it was in our power to make; when our journey was varied by an incident of a somewhat unexpected character.

CHAPTER IX.

AN UNPRAIRIE-LIKE APPARITION.

The incident referred to occurred high up the Arkansas, at the celebrated grove known as the 'Big Timbers.'

We had started about two hours before sundown, and were riding in a due westerly direction, over a 'rolling' prairie—the ridges of which, as ill-luck would have it, ran transversely to our course: causing the path to be constantly going upward or downward.

It was not this that troubled us; but the fact that, as we crested each swell, we were freshly exposed to observation from a distance; and this recurring so often, kept us continuously on the alert.

Once or twice, we thought of halting again

till after the sun had gone down : for we knew that we were treading upon dangerous ground ; but, failing to perceive any fresh Indian sign, we gave way to our irresolution, and continued on.

We proceeded with caution, however: always ascending in stealthy silence, and peeping carefully over the ridges before crossing them. After reconnoitring the intervening valleys, we would ride rapidly across, to make up the time we had lost in our reconnoissance.

In this way had we travelled some eight or ten miles—until the sun was so far down, that his lower limb rested on the horizon.

We were ascending a ridge, and had got our eyes on a level with its crest, when upon the face of another ridge—about half a mile further on—we beheld two forms outlined against the declivity.

We saw that they were human forms; and that they were Indians was our first thought; but a moment's observation convinced us we were in error.

They were afoot—Indians would have been on horseback. There was no floating drapery about their bodies—Indians would have had something of this sort; besides there were other circumstances observable in their figures and movements, that negatived the supposition of their being red-skins. They were singularly disproportioned in size: one appearing at least a foot the taller, while the shorter man had twice this advantage in girth!

'What, in Old Nick's name, kin they be?' inquired my companion—though only in soliloquy, for he saw that I was as much puzzled as himself. 'Kin ye make 'em out wi' your glass, capt'n?'

I chanced to have a small pocket-telescope. Adopting the suggestion, I drew it forth, and levelled it.

In another instant, I had within its field of vision a tableau that astonished me.

The figures composing it were but two—a very tall man, and a very short one. Both were dressed in round-about jackets and trousers. One, the shorter, had a little dark cap

upon his head; while the height of the taller man was increased full ten inches, by what appeared to be a black silk or beaver hat.

The cut of their respective costumes was nearly the same; but the colour was entirely different—the tall personage being all over of a bottle-green tint, while his shorter companion shone more conspicuously in sky-blue.

Notwithstanding their vivid colours, neither costume had anything Indian about it; nor was it like any other sort of 'rig' that one might expect to encounter upon the prairies. What fashion it was, did not occur to me at the moment; for the sun, glancing upon the object-glass of the telescope, hindered me from having a fair view. Moreover, my attention was less directed to the dress of the men, than to their movements.

The backs of both were towards us; and they were going forward in the same direction as ourselves. The tall man was in the lead, carrying what appeared to be two guns—one over his left shoulder, and another in his right hand. He was advancing in slow irregular

strides, his thin body slightly stooped forward, and his long neck craned out in front of him as if trying to look over the ridge, whose crest he was just approaching.

The short man was some half-dozen paces in the rear; and moving in a fashion altogether different. His body was bent against the hill at an angle of less than forty-five degrees with the horizon; and his short stout legs were playing in rapid steps, as if keeping time to a treadmill! He appeared to be pushing something before him; but what it was, I could not guess: since it was completely covered by the disc of his body spread broadly against the hill.

It was not till he had reached the summit, and made a slight turn along the ridge, that I saw what this object was.

The exclamation of ludicrous surprise, that escaped my companion, told me that he had also made it out.

'Good gosh, capt'n!' cried he, 'look yander! Consarn my skin! ef't ain't a *wheelberra!*'

A wheelbarrow it certainly was: for the two men were now traversing along the top of the ridge, and their bodies, from head to foot, were conspicuously outlined against the sky. There was no mistaking the character of the object in the hands of the shorter individual—a barrow beyond the shadow of a doubt—trundle and trams, box, body, and spoke-wheel complete!

The sight of this homely object, in the midst of the savage prairies, was ludicrous as unexpected; and we might have hailed it with roars of laughter, had prudence permitted such an indecorous exhibition. As it was, my companion *chuckled* so loudly, that I was compelled to caution him.

Whether my caution came too late, and that the laughter was heard, we could not tell; but at that moment the tall pedestrian looked back, and we saw that he had discovered us.

Making a rapid sign to his companion, he bounded off like a startled deer; and, after a plunge or two, disappeared behind the ridge

—followed in full run by the man with the wheelbarrow!

One might have supposed that the fright would have led to the abandonment of the barrow. But no: it was taken along—hurried out of our sight in an instant—and in the next, both man and machine disappeared as suddenly as if some trap had admitted them into the bowels of the earth!

The singular fashion of their flight—the long strides taken by the gander-like leader, and the scrambling attempt at escape made by the barrow-man—produced a most comic effect. I was no longer able to restrain myself, but joined my companion in loud and repeated peals of laughter.

In this merry mood, and without any apprehension of danger, we advanced towards the spot where the odd figures had been seen. Some broken ground delayed us; and as half a mile of it had to be passed over, we were a considerable time in reaching the summit of the hill.

On arriving there, and looking over the

swell, behind which they had disappeared, neither tall nor short man was to be seen. A timbered valley lay beyond: into this they had evidently escaped. The track of the wheelbarrow, where it had pressed down the grass, alone indicated their recent presence upon the spot—as it did also the direction they had taken.

Their retreating from us was easily accounted for: they could have seen only the tops of our heads, and had no doubt taken us for Indians!

CHAPTER X.

A FOOT OF THIRTEEN INCHES.

The presence of the wheelbarrow explained a point that had been puzzling us for some days. We had fallen upon its track more than once, and supposed it to have been made by the wheel of a cart; but in no instance being able to find the corresponding one, had given it up as a hopeless enigma. The only explanation we had succeeded in offering ourselves was: that some light cart had accompanied the caravan —the load of which, being badly balanced, had thrown the weight upon one wheel, allowing the other to pass over the ground without making an impression. As it was only on dry grass we had traced it, this explanation

had sufficed—though far from being satisfactory. Neither my companion nor myself ever thought of a wheelbarrow. Who would, in such a place?

'In the name o' Old Nick, who kin they be?' asked Wingrove, as we halted on the ridge, where the fugitives had been last seen.

'I am not without my suspicions,' I replied, just then thinking of a peculiarity that had but slightly occupied my attention—the cut and colour of their dresses. 'If I am not mistaken, the two shy birds that have fled from us are a brace of uncle Sam's eagles.'

'Sojers?'

'In all probability, and "old sojers" at that.'

'But what 'ud sojers be a doin' out hyar?'

'Travelling to California, like ourselves.'

'Desarters, may be?'

'Just what I suspect. No doubt the pair have slipped off from some of the frontier posts; and having no opportunity to provide themselves with a better means of transport, have brought the wheelbarrow with them. It

is ludicrous enough, but by no means improbable. There are some queer customers in the service of Uncle Sam.'

'I think there be—ha, ha, ha! What shed we do, capt'n? Hedn't we better catch up to 'em?'

'That, comrade, may be easier said than done. If they're deserters—and they must be, if they're soldiers at all—they'll take precious good care not to let any one come near them, if they can help it. The escort that accompanies the train will account for their not being along with it. If they've caught a glimpse of my buttons, they'll be *cachéd* by this time.'

'They only seed our heads. I reck'n they tuk us for Injuns?'

'In that case, they'll hide from us all the same—only a little more cunningly.'

'Consarn their sojer skins! Ef they war as cunnin' as a kupple o' possums, they can't a hide the track o' the berra; an' so long 's they keep in the timber, I kalklate I kin lift thar trail. I reck'n I ain't quite forgot how:

though I am bamfoozled a bit by these hyar parairies—consarn them! Ah! them woods, capt'n! it diz one good to look at 'em!'

The eyes of the young hunter sparkled with enthusiasm as he spoke. It was a real forest that was before us—a large tract covered with gigantic cotton-wood trees, and the only thing deserving the name of forest we had seen for many days.

As my companion stood gazing upon it, I could trace upon his countenance a joyous expression, that rarely appeared there. The sight of the 'Big Timbers' recalled to him the forests of his own Tennessee—with happy memories of other times. They were not unmingled with shadows of regret: as I could tell by the change that came stealing over his features.

'We must try to overtake them,' said I, without answering to the ebullition. 'It is important for us to come up with them. Even if they be deserters, they are white men; and all whites are friends here. They muster two guns; and if these fellows are what I take

them to be, they know how to handle them. We must follow them: there's no time to be lost.'

'Ye 're right thar, capt'n! The night 's a comin' down fast. It's a'ready gettin' dark; an' I 'm afeerd it 'll be tough trackin' under the timber. If we 're to catch up wi' them the night, we hain't a minnit to spare.'

'Let us forward then!'

Crossing the ridge, we descended rapidly on the other side—the track of the wheel guiding us in a direct line to the nearest point of the woods.

We could tell that the barrow had been trundled down the hill at top speed—by the manner in which the iron tire had abraded the surface of the slope.

We had no difficulty in following the trace as far as the edge of the timber, and for some distance into it: but there, to our great surprise, the wheel-track abruptly ended!

It was not that we had lost it—by its having passed over dry or rocky ground. On the contrary, around the spot where it so sud-

denly disappeared, the surface was comparatively soft; and even an empty barrow would have made an impression sufficiently traceable, either by my companion or myself.

After beating about for some time, and extending our circle to the distance of a hundred yards or so, we failed to recover the sign. Certainly the barrow had not gone farther—at all events, not upon its trundle?

Instinctively, we turned our eyes upward—not with any superstitious belief that the fugitives had made a sudden ascent into the air. But the idea had occurred to us, that they might have hidden themselves in a tree, and drawn the barrow up into it.

A single glance was sufficient to satisfy us that this conjecture was erroneous. The thin foliage of the cotton-woods offered no cover. A squirrel could hardly have concealed itself among their branches.

'I've got it!' exclaimed the hunter, once more seeking along the surface. 'Hyar's thar tracks; tho' thar ain't no signs of the berra. I see how they've blinded us. By

gosh! thar a kupple o' cunnin' old coons, whosomever they be.'

'How have they managed it?'

'Tuk up the machine on thar shoulders, an' toted it thataway! See! thar's thar own tracks! They 've gone out hyar—atween these two trees.'

'Right, comrade!—that appears to be the way they 've done it. Sure enough there is the direction they have taken.'

'Well! ef I wan't bothered wi' these hyar animals, I ked follow them tracks easy enough. We 'd soon kum upon the wheel agin, I reck'n: they ain't agoin to travel fur, wi' a hump like thet on thar shoulders.'

'No; it 's not likely.'

'Wal, then, capt'n, s'pose we leave our critters hyar, an' take arter 'em afut? We kin quarter the groun' a good bit ahead; an' I guess we 'll eyther kum on them or thar berra afore long.'

I agreed to this proposal; and, after securing our four quadrupeds to trees, we started off into the depth of the woods.

Only for a short distance were we able to make out the footsteps of the men: for they had chosen the dry sward to walk upon.

In one place, where the path was bare of grass, their tracks were distinctly outlined; and a minute examination of them assured me of the correctness of my conjecture—that we were trailing a brace of runaways from a military post. There was no mistaking the print of the 'regulation' shoe. Its shape was impressed upon my memory, as plainly as in the earth before my eyes; and it required no quartermaster to recognise the low, ill-rounded heel and flat pegged soles.

I identified them at a glance; and saw, moreover, that the feet of both the fugitives were encased in the same cheap *chaussure*. Only in size did the tracks differ; and in this so widely, that the smaller was little more than two-thirds the length of the larger one! The latter was remarkable for size—not so much in its breadth as length, which last was not less than thirteen standard inches!

On noting this peculiarity, my companion uttered an exclamation of astonishment.

'Thar's a fut, an' no mistake!' cried he. 'I reck'n twar Long-legs as made them tracks. Well! ef I hedn't seed the man hisself, I 'd a swore thar war giants in these parts!'

I made no reply, though far more astonished than he. My astonishment sprang from a different source; and was mixed up in my mind with some old memories. *I remembered the foot!*

CHAPTER XI.

TRACKING THE TRUNDLE.

Yes, I had seen that foot before; or one so very like it, that the resemblance was cheating me. This could hardly be. With the exception of its fellow, the foot of which I was thinking could have no counterpart on the prairies: it must be the same?

At first, my recollections of it were but vague. I remembered the foot associated with some ludicrous incidents; but what they were, or when and where they had occurred, I could not say. Certainly I had seen it somewhere; but where?

No matter: the foot recalled no unpleasant associations. I felt satisfied it was a *friendly*

one; and was now more anxious than ever of overtaking its sesquipedalian owner.

After proceeding a short distance, the shoe-tracks again became too indistinct to be followed farther.

By quartering, however, we came upon them once more—at a place where the impressions were deep and clearly defined.

Once more the immense foot rose upon the *retina* of my memory—this time more vividly—this time enabling me to *place* it: for I now remembered many an odd incident that had secured it a corner on the page of my recollections.

Sticking through a stirrup with an enormous Mexican spur upon its heel—its owner mounted on a horse thin and rawboned as himself—I remembered the foot, as well as the limbs and body to which it was attached.

Beyond a doubt, the tall fugitive we were following was an old fellow campaigner—a veteran of the "Rifle Rangers!"

The figure, as seen through the telescope, confirmed me in the belief. The long limbs,

arms, and neck—the thin, angular body—all were characteristics of the bodily architecture of Jephthah Bigelow.

I no longer doubted that the taller of the two men was my old follower 'Jeph Bigelow,' or 'Sure-shot,' as his Ranger comrades had christened him; and appropriate was the designation—for a surer shot than Jeph never looked through the hind-sights of a rifle.

Who the little man might turn out to be, I could not guess—though I was not without some recollections of a figure resembling his. I remembered a certain Patrick, who was also a 'mimber of the corpse,' and whose *build* bore a close resemblance to that of him seen between the trams of the barrow.

My conjecture as to who the men were, increased my desire to overtake them. If the tall man should turn out to be Sure-shot, a rifle would be added to our strength worth a dozen ordinary guns; and, considering the risk we were running—in danger of losing our scalps every hour in the day—it was of

no small importance that we should join company with the deserters.

We made every exertion, therefore, to come up with them—my comrade employing all the lore of the backwoods, in his effort to recover their traces.

The new footmarks we had discovered, though lost the instant after, had served one good purpose. They indicated the general direction which the two men had followed; and this was an important point to be ascertained.

We found another index in the trees. These in most places stood thickly together; and it was only here and there that an object of such breadth as a wheelbarrow could pass *conveniently* between their trunks. Carried upon the shoulders, it would be an awkward load with which to squeeze through any tight place; and it was reasonable to conclude that only the more open aisles of the forest would be followed. This enabled us to make pretty sure of the route taken; and, after trusting to such guidance for several hundred yards,

we had the satisfaction to light once more upon the shoe-tracks.

Again only a short distance were we able to follow them; but they confirmed our belief that we were still on the right trail.

My comrade had suggested that the man who carried the barrow 'wud soon tire o' totin' it:' and this proved to be the case. On striking into an old buffalo-path, our eyes were once more gladdened by the sight of the wheel-track—plainly imprinted in the mud.

Our 'prospecting' was for the time at an end. The barrow-track continued along the buffalo-path; and we were able to follow it, almost as fast as our legs could carry us.

Even after it had grown too dark for us to see the track of the wheel, we were not disconcerted. We could follow it by the *feel*—stooping only at intervals to make sure that it was still among our feet.

In this way we had travelled, to the full distance of a mile from the place where our horses had been left, when all at once the barrow-track gave out. The buffalo-path

continued on; but no barrow had passed over it, unless carried as before.

This was improbable, however; and we were forced to the conclusion that the two men had turned off, by some side-path we had not observed.

While looking for this, a sound reached our ears, that resembled the murmur of a distant waterfall; but, listening more attentively, we could distinguish in it a different intonation.

We at once moved in the direction whence the noise came; and before we had advanced a hundred yards through the thickly standing trees, we were aware that what we heard was the sound of human voices.

Another hundred yards brought us within hearing of words—at the same time that a luminous reflection cast upwards upon the trees, indicated that there was a fire at no great distance off. The underwood hindered us from seeing the fire; but guided by its gleam, we continued to advance. After making another long reach through the leafy

cover, we got the fire well under our eyes, as well as those who had kindled it.

We had no conjecture as to whether we had been following the true track, or whether it was the two runaway travellers we had *treed*.

The point was determined by an object seen standing close to the fire, in the full glare of its ruddy light.

Need I say it was the wheelbarrow?

CHAPTER XII.

A BRACE OF 'OLD SOJERS.'

Yes, it was the wheelbarrow; and the 'U. S. Ordnance' branded upon its side, and visible under the light of the blazing pile, told whence it had come. Either Fort Gibson or Fort Smith was minus a barrow, drawn from their stores by no very formal *requisition*.

There were the takers of it—one on each side of the fire—presenting as great a contrast as could well be found in two human beings. Although of the same species, the two individuals were as unlike each other as a tall greyhound to a turnspit.

Both were seated, though in different atti-

tudes. The little man was 'squatted'—that is, with legs crossed under him, after the fashion of tailors.

The long legs of his *vis-à-vis* would scarcely admit of being thus disposed of; and his weight was resting altogether upon his hips and heels. In this posture, the caps of his knees stood up to the level of his shoulders—so that his body, viewed *en profile*, presented a pretty accurate imitation of the letter N—that sort termed by engravers the 'rustic letter.' The huge black hat capped one extremity; and the long pedal-like feet that rested horizontally on the ground terminated the other, completing the alphabetical resemblance.

A face, with a certain mocking monkeyish expression, but without any trait of fierceness or ill-nature—a nose slightly snub—quick scintillating eyes—a chin, tipped with a little tuft of clay-coloured beard—some half-dozen queue-like tangles of bright-yellowish hair, hanging down behind the hat—the hat itself a black 'silk,' badly battered—such were the

salient points of the portrait appearing above the knee-caps of the taller man.

With the exception of the 'tile,' his costume was altogether military—to me well known. It was the ordinary undress of the mounted rifles: a dark-green round-about of coarse cloth—with a row of small brass buttons from throat to waist—and overalls of the same material.—In the particular sample before us, *overalls* was rather an inappropriate name. The garment so designated scarcely covered the calves of the wearer's legs—though of these there was not much to cover. The jacket appeared equally scant; and between its bottom border and the waistband of the trousers, there was an interval of at least six inches. In this interval was seen a shirt of true Isabella colour, which also appeared over the breast—the jacket being worn unbuttoned. The frouzy cotton was visible at other places—peeping through various rents both in jacket and trousers. A black leather stock concealed the collar of the shirt—if there was any—and though the

stock itself was several inches in depth, there were other several inches of naked neck rising above its rim. Coarse woollen socks, and the cheap *contract* shoe completed the costume of Sure-shot—for it was he.

His contrasting comrade was equally in military garb—even more so, by the additional article of a cloth forage-cap. His was also an undress uniform; but, though of very similar cut to the other, and resembling it in the quality of the material, the colour was different. It was sky-blue, turned whitey with wear—the buttons of the jacket being of lead, and the facings of white worsted tape. It was a better fit than the green uniform; and its wearer had evidently some conceit in the style of it—as was evidenced by the jacket being carefully buttoned from waist to throat, and the forage-cap set jauntily on 'three hairs.'

The little man was an 'infantry.' His horizontal diameter was twice that of his tall companion of the rifles; and in the rounded contour of his body, not an angle was ap-

parent. His garments were quite filled by his body, arms, and legs—so that there was not a wrinkle to be seen anywhere. It was a form usually styled 'dapper.'

His face was also of the rotund shape—the features all tolerably regular, with the exception of the nose—that, like the nasal organ of his comrade, was a *nez retroussé*—the turn-up being infinitely more pronounced.

The expression was equally indicative of good-nature and good-fellowship—as the apple-like bloom of his cheeks, and the ochreous tinge upon the tip of the nose, sufficiently testified. Cheeks, lips, and chin were beardless—with the exception of a thick stubble that had lately sprung up; but some well-greased rings of a darkish colour, ruffing out under the rim of the forage-cap, showed that the 'infantry' was not insensible to the pride of hair.

Neither in regard to him had I made a mistaken conjecture. Another old acquaintance and comrade-in-arms—the redoubtable Patrick O'Tigg—a true son of the 'Sad.'

The two worthies, when first seen, were seated as described—both engaged in a very similar occupation—cooking. It was by the most simple process—that of the *roti*. Each held in his hand a long sapling, upon the end of which a piece of red meat was impaled; and this, projected over the fire, was fast blackening in the blaze.

More of the same meat—buffalo-beef, it appeared—was seen in the wheelbarrow; its other freight being one or two greasy bags, a brace of knapsacks, a cartouche box and belt, two ordnance spades, with the guns—a 'regulation' rifle and musket—lying across the top of the load.

It was evident from this collection that the men were deserters; that they had armed and equipped themselves at the expense of the quartermaster. Perhaps the paymaster had been in arrears with them; and they had adopted this ready and effectual method of wiping out the score?

My only wonder was at not seeing a brace of *branded* horses along with them; but in all

probability, on the day—or night—of their departure, the stable sentry had been doing his duty.

On becoming assured of the identity of the two individuals, my first impulse was to step forward to the fire, and make myself known to them.

So eagerly were both engaged in attending to their spits, that they had neither seen nor heard us—although they themselves were now silent, and we were within less than twenty feet of them.

The intervening bushes, however, would have sheltered us from their sight, even if they had been a little more vigilant—as I should have expected Sure-shot to have been.

They were trusting all to the thicket in which they had pitched their camp; and, being hungry and wearied no doubt, were for the moment off their guard.

Some fantasy decided me not to disturb them for a moment—a sort of curiosity to hear what they would say, and, if possible, discover their *whence* and *whither*. We were

perfectly within ear-shot; and could have heard even a whisper passing from their lips —as we could also note the expression upon their faces.

A sign to my companion was sufficient; and, crouching behind the leafy screen, we awaited the continuation of the suspended dialogue.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE BARROW IN DEBATE.

Our patience was not put to a severe test. O'Tigg was not the man to keep his tongue in tranquillity for any extended time. Neither was Sure-shot an admirer of the silent system. Both were talkers.

On this occasion the 'infantry' was the first to make himself heard.

'Be japers! comrayde, I'm afther thinkin' fwhat purty fools us hiv bin, to tak it afut this way, loike two thramps, whin wez moight ivery bit as wil hav been stroidin' a pair ov good pownies. We cowld a fitched a pair from the Fort wid all the aize in the wurld.'

'Yees, Petrick, certing ye ain't fer 'stray 'bout thet pertickler; we've been raither ungumptious.'

'Besoides, wez moight as wil hav been hung for a shape as a lamb. We'll be flogg'd all as wan, iv the ischort foinds us, fur taykin' the guns, an' the knapsacks, an' the whaleborra—bad luck to the borra!'

'No, Petrick, don't cuss the berra—it hes served us for certing. We kedn't a got along 'ithout the machine—how ked we? We ked niver hev toted our doins es we've did; an' but for the piece o' bacon an' thet eer bag o' meal, we'd a sterved long afore this, I recking. Don't cuss the berra.'

'Och! it's made my showlders ache, as if some schoundrel had been batin' them wid a sprig ov shillaylah!'

'Ne'er a mind 'bout thet! yer shoulders 'll be all right arter ye've got a wink o' sleep. Spank my skin! ef thet ere wan't a cute dodge – it's throwd the Indyens off o' the scent for certing; or we'd a heerd some'ut o' them verming afore this.'

'Faith, I think we've sucksaided in bamboozling thim, shure enough.'

The meat by this time showed sufficiently done; and the two men applied themselves to eating, with an earnestness that allowed no time for talking.

The conversation had revealed enough of their past actions, and future designs, to confirm the conjectures I had already formed about them.

As stated, they had both belonged to the 'Rangers' of immortal memory.

After the disbandment of the corps, they had entered upon a fresh lease of soldier-life. by enlisting into the regular army. O'Tigg had given preference to the sky-blue of the 'line;' while the Yankee had taken to the mounted rifles— as a capital marksman, like him, would naturally do. Indeed, it would have been impossible to have 'licked' the latter into anything like soldierly shape; and all the drill-sergeants in creation could not have made him stand with 'toes turned in,' or 'eyes right.' To have 'dressed' the old

ranger in line would have been a physical impossibility.

In the mounted rifles, personal appearance is of less importance; and considering the little inclination there is to enlist in the American army—especially in times of peace—the oddest looking article is thankfully accepted. In the dearth of recruits, Sureshot could have had no difficuly in passing inspection.

Both had evidently become tired of their respective services. The routine of a frontier post is of itself sufficient to produce the deadliest *ennui*; and the Californian attraction had 'capped the climax.' The temptation was too strong for either Yankee or Hibernian nature to resist; and these worthy types of both had taken French-leave of the fort. It was thus that I epitomised the recent history of my old *camarados*.

As they were evidently aware of the caravan being in the advance, and had been following it, it was easily conjectured that Fort Smith—a military post on the Arkansas op-

posite Van Buren—had been the scene of their defection.

Very likely, they had kept near the train all along the route—with a view to guidance and partial protection—as also for a *dernier ressort* to which they might betake themselves in case of their stores giving out. The escort, hinted at, would be sufficient to account for their not being in closer communication with the caravan.

It appeared, they had been so far fortunate in escaping an encounter with Indians; but this, as in our case, was most likely due to the passage of the caravan. We knew that the red-skinned robbers would be too much occupied with the train itself and its more immediate stragglers, to be looking out for any so far in the rear as we; and to this circumstance, no doubt, were we indebted for the uninterrupted travel we had achieved. A greater proximity to the train would have rendered our passage more perilous.

Sure-shot, though a slouch in his dress, was no simpleton. The trick of taking up the

barrow was, no doubt, a conception of his brain, as well as its being borne upon the shoulders of the Irishman—who, in all likelihood, had performed the *role* of wheeling it from Fort Smith to the Big Timbers, and was expected to push it before him to the edge of the Pacific Ocean!

It was evident that Patrick was tired of his task: for they had not made much progress in their Homeric supper, before he once more returned to the subject.

'But shure now, comrayde! we moight manage widout the borra—seein' as we've got into the buffalos' counthry. Aren't them bastes as aizy to kill as tame cows? Shure we'd niver be widout mate as long as our powder lasts?'

'Jess t'other way, ye fool! We're a going *out* o' the buffuler country, an' into perts where theer ain't a anymal bigger than a ret. On t'other side o' the mountings, theer ain't no beests o' any kind—neery one; an' its jess theer we'll want that eer bag o' meel. Ef we don't take it along, we'll sterve for certing.'

'Be me sowl! I'd ruther carry the male on my showlders. There's liss of it now; an' maybe I could manage it, iv yould only carry the spids, an' thim other things. We moight lave the knapsicks an' kyarthridge-box behind. What use ud they be in Kalifornya? They'll only lade to our detiction by the throops out there.'

'Don't ee be skeert 'bout thet, ki made! Ef theer's troops in Californey, they'll hev theer hands full 'ithout troublin' us, I recking. We ain't like to be the only two critters as hain't got a *pass* for the diggins. Ne'er a bit o't. We'll find deserters out theer es thick as blue-bottles on a karkiss. Certingly we shell. Besides, Petrick, we needn't take the knepsacks all the way out theer, nor the berra neyther, nor nuthin' else we've brought from the Fort.'

'Fwhat div yez mane?' interrogated the Irishman—evidently puzzled to interpret the other's speech.

'We kin leave all them fixins in Morming City.'

'But will the thrain be afther thravellin' that way? Shure ye don't know that.'

'Certing it will. A putty consid'able pert o' it air made up o' Mormings; an' they'll be boun' to the Salt Lake. We kin foller them an' drop t'other. In the Morming settlements, we kin swop our unyforms for suthin' else, an' the berra too. Es to the knepsacks an' cat-ridge-box, I guess es how I inteend to make a spec on them ere two articles.'

'Fwhat! a pair ov sodger knapsacks, an' an owld kyarthridge-box! They wuldn't fitch the worth ov dhrinks apaice?'

'Theer your mistaking, Mister Tigg. Pree-heps they'll swop better'n you think. How d'ye kno w I ain't like to git a beest apiece for 'em—eyther a mule or a hoss? This child ain't a going to fut it all the way to Califor-ney. B'yont the Morming City, he rides a spell, I recking.'

'Be japers! that's an out-an'-out good oidea. But how dev ye mane to carry it through? that's what bothers Patrick O'Tigg.'

'We— ell, Petrick, I'll tell ee my plan. I

hain't got it straightened out yet, but I hope to hev it all right by the time we're on t'other side the mountings — leastwise before we reaches Morming City.'

'Arrah! fwhat is it?' inquired the impatient Irishman.

The Yankee did not vouchsafe an immediate answer; but, while polishing off the bone he held in his hand, appeared at the same time to be busy with some mental operation— perhaps *straightening out* the plan he had promised to reveal.

CHAPTER XIV.

A TOUGH STORY.

For some seconds the two worthies observed a mutual silence—broken only by a formidable rattle of teeth, as large 'chunks' of buffalo-meat were put through their respective masticating machines.

Curious to hear the promised revelation, Wingrove and I checked our impatience, and clung to our covert among the bushes.

One thing—to which their speech had incidentally adverted—was not without much significance; and had produced upon me a certain impression that was unpleasant. They appeared to know, or Sure-shot did,

that at least a portion of the train was *en route* for the Mormon city. It is true, I had had originally suspicions of this; but the letter of Lilian had led me to hope it might be otherwise. Any destination but that.

I had commenced reflecting upon this point, when I was interrupted by the voice of Sure-shot resuming the conversation.

Thus did he enter on his explanation:

'Ye see, kimrade, these Mormings, es I've heern, air mighty taken up wi sogerin', an' thet sort o' thing. Ye've heerd talk o' theer great bettelion. They'll be arter these eer treppings for certing, since they hain't much chence o' gittin' soger-fixings out theer. We —eel, what I mean to do is to put the knepsacks off on 'em for some new improvement o' pattern. I guess it air thet—I've heerd say so at the Fort—then the Morming jineral, who air the prophet hisself, an' who's got berrls of dollars—he'll buy the knepsacks at any price. Now, de ye take, Mister Tigg?'

'Troth do I. But dev ye think yez can fool thim so aizy?'

'Easy as eatin' punkin-pie. Jehosophet! I hain't been five year in the tradin' line 'ithout lernin' the bizness, I recking.'

'Be me faith! yez must hiv been raal cliver at it, whin ye sould them cypress-knees for bacon-hams to the Bawltemoreans. You remimber that story yez towld us down in Mixico?'

'Yees; certingly I remember it—he, he, he! But I kim a better trick then thet on the Orleans people 'bout five yeer ago—jest 'fore I jined the rangers.'

'Fwhat was it, shure?'

'We—ell, ye see, I wan't allers es poor es I'm now. I hed a pertnership in a bit o' a schooner es used to trade 'tween Bosting an' Orleens, an' we used to load her wi' all sorts o' notions, to sell to the Orleens folk. Jehosophet an' pork-pies! they air fools, an' no mistake—them Creole French. We ked a sold 'em wooden nutmegs, an' brick-dust for Cuyenne pepper, an' such like; an' I 'bout guess es how we did spekoolate a leetle in thet line o' bizness. Wall, their kim a time

when they tuk a notion they ked make cheep *brogan*, as they call 'em, out o' allygator's leather, an' supply the hul nigger market wi' 'em. The neels were dear, an' so they tuk to usin' boot-pegs; but not hevin' a manafactry o' the pegs down south, they hed to git 'em from the no'th. Jest then, my pertner an' I thought o' makin' a spekoolashun on the pegs; so we loaded our schooner wi' thet ere freight, chuck right up to the hetches; an' then sot off from Bostiug for Orleans. We thort we'd make our derned fortune out o' thet eer trip.'

'Shure yez did, didn't ye?'

'No—o—o; neer a bit o' 't. It keemd nigh breakin' us.'

'Arrah, how?'

'We—ell! ye see, when we got roun' to Orleans, we learned that the boot-trade hed a'most stopped. The allygator leather didn't turn out jest the thing for brogans; an' besides, it got sca'ce by reezun o' the killin' o' them verming. In coorse, the pegs hed fell in price; they'd kim down so low, that we ked only git twenty-five cents a bushel for 'em!'

'Mother ov Moses! only twenty-five cints a bushel!'

'Thet was all they'd fetch—offer 'em when an' wheer we would. In coorse, we wan't fools enough to take thet—the dernationed pegs hed cost us more in Bosting!'

'Divil a doubt ov it? But fwhat did yez do wid 'em, anyhow?'

'We—ell, Mister Tigg, we weer cleen beet at fust; an' didn't know what to do—neyther me'r my pertner. But arter takin' a good think over it, I seed a way o' gitting out o' the scrape—leestwise 'ithout sech a loss as sellin' the pegs at twenty-five cents the bushel. I seed a chence o' gitting rid o' them at fifty cents.'

'Arrah, now! in fwhat way, comrayde?'

'You've seed boot-pegs, I recking, Mister Tigg?'

'An' shure I hiv. Aren't they the same that's in these suttlers' brogues we've got on—bad luck to them?'

'Jess the same—only whitier when they air new.'

'Be japers! I think I remimber seein' a barrel full ov thim in New Yark.'

'Very certing it were them—they air usooaly packed in berr'ls. Can you think o' anything they looked like?'

'Wil, in troth, they looked more loike oats than anything I can recollect. Shure they did look moighty loike oats!'

'An' don't ee kalkerlate they'd a looked more like oats, ef they'd been pointed at both ends instead o' one?'

'In troth, would they—all that same.'

'We—ll, thet's the very idee thet kim inter my mind at the time.'

'Arrah now, is it? An' fwhat did yez do wid the pegs then?'

'*Jest sharpened the other eends o' 'em, an' sold 'em for oats.*'

The puzzled, half-incredulous stare, on the countenance of the Hibernian, was ludicrous in the extreme. The allegation of the Yankee had deprived him of speech; and for some moments he sat gazing at the latter, evidently in doubt whether to give credence to the story,

or reject it as a little bit of a 'sell' upon the part of his comrade—with whose eccentricity of character he was well acquainted.

Equally ludicrous was the look of gravity on the countenance of the other—which he continued to preserve under the continued gaze of his comrade, with all the solemnity of a judge upon the bench.

It was as much as my companion and I could do to restrain our laughter; but we were desirous of witnessing the finale of the affair, and, by an effort, succeeded in holding in.

'Och, now, Misther Shure-shat!' gasped the Irishman at length, 'an' it's only jokin' ye arr?'

'Truth I tell ye, Petrick—every word o' 't. Ye see the oats weer jest then sellin' at fifty cents the bushel, an' thet paid us. We made a leetle suthin', too, by the speekola-shun.'

'But how did yez get the other inds pointed at all—at all?'

'Oh! thet weer eezy enough. I invented a machine for thet, an' run 'em through in

less'n no time. When they kim out at t'other eend o' the machine, *I kednt meself a told 'em from oats.*'

'Och! now I comprehend. Arrah! an' wasn't it a quare thrick? Be my sowl, it bates Bannagher all to paces! Ha, ha, haw!'

Wingrove and I could hold in no longer, but joining in the loud cachinnation—as if we had been its echoes—sprang forward to the front.

Infantry and rifleman bounded to their feet, with a simultaneous shout of 'Indians!' and dropping their spits and half-eaten *appolas* of meat, dashed into the bushes like a pair of frightened rabbits!

In an instant, both were out of sight; and their whereabouts was alone indicated by the rattling of the branches as they passed through them.

I was apprehensive of losing them altogether; and regretted not having used more caution in approaching them.

At that crisis, an idea came to my aid; and giving out an old signal, well remembered by

the *ci-devant* rangers, I had the gratification of receiving a double response.

The utterance of the signal had brought them to an instantaneous halt; and I could hear them exchanging surmises and exclamations of astonishment, as they retraced their steps towards the fire.

Presently, a pair of short, snub-nosed faces were seen peering through the leaves; while from the lips of their owners burst simultaneously 'The cyaptin'!' 'The capting!' with various other phrases in their respective *patois*, expressive of surprise and recognition.

A few words sufficed to explain all. As we had surmised, the men were deserters. Neither attempted to deny what, in time of peace, is not considered a very heinous crime; and for which, just then, the 'Californian fever' was considered an ample justification.

It was no affair of ours. I was only too rejoiced to join company with the runaways, of whose loyalty to myself I had proofs of old. Their guns—more especially the rifle of Sure-shot—would be a valuable addition to our

strength; and, instead of crawling along under the cover of night, we might now advance with more freedom and rapidity.

It was determined therefore, to share our means of transport with our new comrades—an offer by them eagerly and readily accepted.

The partial consumption of our stores had lightened the packs upon our mules; and the contents of the wheelbarrow, equally divided between them, would give to each only its ordinary load.

The barrow itself was abandoned—left among the Big Timbers—to puzzle at a future period some red-skinned archæologist—Cheyenne or Arapaho!

CHAPTER XV.

THE MOUNTAIN PARKS.

We now proceeded along the route with more confidence; though still acknowledging the necessity of caution, and always reconnoitring the ground in advance. Although the four of us might have defended ourselves against four times our number of Indian enemies, we were passing through a part of the country, where, if Indians were to be met at all, it would be in large bands or 'war-parties.'

The Arkansas heads in that peculiar section of the Rocky Mountain chain known as the 'Parks'—a region of country celebrated from the earliest times of fur-trading and trapping—the arena of a greater number of

adventures—of personal encounters and hair-breadth escapes—than perhaps any other spot of equal extent upon the surface of the globe. Here the great Cordillera spread out into numerous distinct branches or 'Sierras,' over which tower those noted landmarks of the prairie traveller, 'Pike's' and 'Long's' Peaks, and the 'Wa-to-ya' or 'Cumbres Españolas;—projected far above their fellows, and rising thousands of feet into the region of eternal snow.

Between their bases—embosomed amid the most rugged surrounding of bare rocky cliffs, or dark forest-clad declivities—lie *vallés*, smiling in the soft verdure of perpetual spring—watered by crystal streams—sheltered from storms, and sequestered from all the world. The most noted of these are the Old and New 'Parks,' and the 'Bayou Salade'—because these are the largest; but there are hundreds of smaller ones, not nameless, but known only to those adventurous men—the trappers—who for half a century have dwelt in this paradise of their perilous profession: since here is

the habitat of the masonic beaver—its favourite *building ground.*

Over these valley-plains roam 'gangs' of the gigantic buffalo; while in the openings between their copses may be descried the elk, antelope, and black-tailed deer, browsing in countless herds. On the cliffs that overhang them, the noble form of the *carnero cimmaron* (*ovis montana*)—or, 'Bighorn' of the hunters—may be seen, in bold outline against the sky; and crawling through the rocky ravines is encountered the grizzly bear—the most fierce and formidable of American *carnivora.* The red couguar and brown wolverene crouch along the edges of the thicket, to contest with jackal and wolf the possession of the carcass, where some stray quadruped has fallen a victim to the hungry troop; while black vultures wheeling aloft, await the issue of the conflict.

Birds of fairer fame add animation to the scene. The magnificent *meleagris*, shining in metallic lustre, with spread wings and tail, offers a tempting aim to the hunter's rifle—as it promises to afford him a rich repast; and

the *coc de prairie*, and its gigantic congener the 'sage grouse,' whirr up at intervals along the path.

The waters have their denizens, in the gray Canada and white-fronted geese—ducks of numerous species—the stupid pelican and shy loon—gulls, cormorants, and the noble swan; while the groves of *alamo* ring with the music of numerous bright-winged songsters, scarcely known to the ornithologist.

But no land of peace is this fair region of the Rocky Mountains. There are parks, but no palaces—there are fertile fields, but none to till them—for it is even dangerous to traverse them in the open light of day. The trapper skulks silently along the creek—scarcely trusting himself to whisper to his companion—and watching warily as he renews the bait of *castoreum*. The hunter glides with stealthy tread from copse to copse—dreading the echo of his own rifle. Even the red-skinned rover goes not here alone, but only with a large band of his kindred—a 'hunting' or 'war party.'

The ground is neutral, as it is hostile—claimed by many tribes and owned by none. All enter it to hunt or make war, but none to settle or colonise. From every quarter of the compass come the warrior and hunter; and of almost as many tribes as there are points upon the card. From the north, the Crow and Sioux; from the south, the Kiowa, the Comanche, the Jicarilla-Apache—and even at times the tame Taosa. From the east penetrate the Cheyenne, the Pawnee, and Arapaho; while through the western gates of this hunters' paradise, pour the warlike bands of the Utah and Shoshonee. All these tribes are in mutual enmity or amity amongst themselves, of greater or less strength; but between some of them exists a hostility of the deadliest character. Such are the vendettas between Crow and Shoshonee, Pawnee and Comanche, Utah and Arapaho.

Some of the tribes have the repute of being friendly to the whites. Among these may be mentioned the Utahs and Crows; while the more dreaded names are Cheyenne, Kiowa, and Arapaho: the last in hostility to the whites

equalling the noted Blackfeet father north. In all cases, however, the amity of the prairie Indian is a friendship upon which slight faith can be placed; and the trapper—even in Crow or Utah land—is accustomed 'to sleep with one eye open.'

In past times, the Utahs have been more partial to the pale-faces than most other tribes of North Americans; and in their territory many of the celebrated trapper-stations, or 'rendezvous,' are situated. At times, mutual provocations have led to dire encounters; and then are the Utahs to be dreaded—more, perhaps, than any other Indians. In their association with their trapper allies, they have learned how to handle—and with skill—that most formidable of weapons, for partisan warfare—the hunter's rifle.

At the time of which I write, the Utahs were reported to be on good terms with the whites. The Mormons had done everything to conciliate them; and it was said that a single white man might traverse their territory with perfect safety.

It was chiefly in the passes that led to the Utahs' country, that danger from Indians was to be apprehended—in the valleys and ravines above mentioned—where Cheyennes, Comanches, Pawnees, and Arapahoes were more likely to be met with than the Utahs themselves.

We were not yet certain by which pass the caravan might cross the great Cordillera. From beyond the Big Timbers, three routes were open to it. First was the southern route through the Raton mountains, which leads to Santa Fé, in New Mexico, and is known as the 'Santa Fé trail.' I did not anticipate their taking this one. It was not their design, on leaving Fort Smith, to pass by Santa Fé —else would they have kept up the Canadian, by the head of the Llano Estacado; and thence to California by the Gila.

Another route parts from the Arkansas still higher up—by one of its affluents, the *Fontaine que bouit.* This is the 'Cherokee trail,' which, after running north along the eastern slope of the Rocky Mountains, crosses

them by the Cheyenne Pass, and on through Bridger's Pass into the central valley of the Great Basin.

Neither did I believe that the train would travel by this trail. The season of the year was against the supposition.

In all probability, the central route of the three would be the one followed—leading from the Arkansas up the Huerfano river, and through 'Robideau's Pass,' or that of the 'Sangre de Cristo.' Either of these conducts into the valley of the Rio del Norte; thence by the famed 'Coochetopa,' or 'gate of the buffaloes,' on the head waters of the Western Colorado.

This pass, though long known to the trappers and *ciboleros* of New Mexico, had only just come into notice as a road to the Pacific; but, being one of the most central and direct, it had already been tried both by Californian and Mormon emigrants, and found practicable for waggons. The caravan had left Van Buren with the design of taking this road; but I knew that the design might be

altered by contingencies — hence our uncertainty.

The Rocky Mountains could be crossed, by following up the Arkansas to its remotest sources on the southern side of the Bayou Salade; but the stupendous gorges through which that river runs leave no pass practicable for wheeled vehicles. Only by mounted men, or pack-mules, can the Cordillera be crossed at that point; and of course it did not occur to us that the caravan we were following would attempt it.

At three points, then, might we expect to find its trace parting from the Arkansas—near Bent's Old Fort, for the southern route; at the *Fontaine que bouit* river, for the northern; and for the central, it should diverge up the valley of the Huerfano.

In any case, our risk would be unquestionably great. We should have to travel through districts of country, where white man and red man meet only as foes; where to kill each other at sight is the instinct and practice of both; and where, though it may sound strange

to civilised ears, to *scalp*, after killing each other, is equally a *mutual* custom!

Such was the character of the region through which we should have to travel. No wonder we were anxious to come up with the caravan, before it should have passed through the dangerous gorges of the mountains. Independent of other motives, our personal safety prompted us to hasten on.

At first, our new comrades were not exactly agreeable to the design of overtaking the train. They had the *escort* in their thoughts, and along with it, the dread of the nine-tailed cat. But a little instruction as to the far greater danger they were in from Indians—of which up to that hour they had been in happy ignorance—reconciled them to our purpose; and thenceforward they picked up their feet with a pleasing rapidity. Both preferred risking the skin of their backs to losing that of their heads; but of the former they had now less fear: since I had promised to *disguise* them, before bringing them face to face with the troopers of the escort.

Notwithstanding our increased strength, we travelled with as much caution as ever: for the danger had augmented in proportion. We made most way under the friendly shadow of night—sometimes by the light of the moon—and only by day, when we could discover no Indian sign in our neighbourhood.

Only two of us could ride at a time—the other two taking it afoot; but in this way a journey can be made almost as well, as when each has a horse to himself. Our pack-animals gave us little trouble: as the continued travel had long since trained them to follow in file, and without requiring to be led.

We refrained from making fires, where the ground was unfavourable. Only when we could choose our camp in the midst of a timbered thicket, or down in the secluded depth of some rocky ravine, did we risk kindling fires; and them we extinguished as soon as they had served the purposes of our simple *cuisine*.

These precautions, drawn from experience, were absolutely necessary in a passage across

the prairies—at least by a party so small as ours. Perhaps had we continued them, we might have escaped a misfortune that soon after befell us; and the tale of which is now to be told.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE ABANDONED BOUQUET.

HAVING passed Bent's Fort—of wide celebrity in trapper lore—whilom the scene of many a wild revel of the 'mountain men,' but now abandoned and in ruins—we arrived at the confluence of the Huerfano.

As we expected, the trace turned up the valley of this latter stream—thus deciding the route taken by the caravan.

We rode on through a forest of grand cotton-woods and willows; and at about seven miles distant from the mouth of the Huerfano river, reached a point, whee the caravan had crossed over to its left bank.

On the other side, we could see the ground

of their encampment of the night before. We could tell it by the fresh traces of animals and waggons—debris of the morning's repast—and half-burnt fagots of the fires that had cooked it, still sending up their clouds of oozing smoke.

The stream at this point was fordable; and crossing over, we stood upon the deserted camp-ground.

With singular emotions, I walked amid the smouldering fires—forming conjectures as to which of them might have been graced by that fair presence. Where had she passed the night, and what had occupied her thoughts? Were those gentle words still lingering in her memory? Were they upon her lips?

It was pleasant for me to repeat them. I did not need to draw the writing forth. Long since were the lines fixed in my remembrance—oft through my heart had vibrated the burden of that sweet song:

'I think of thee—I think of thee!'

My reflections were not altogether un-

mingled with pain. Love cannot live without doubts and fears. Jealousy is its infallible concomitant—ever present as the thorn with the rose.

How could I hope that one hour of my presence had been sufficient, to inspire in that young bosom the passion of a life? It could scarcely be other than a slight impression—a passing admiration of some speech, word, or gesture—too transient to be true? Perhaps I was already forgotten? Perhaps only remembered with a smile, instead of a sigh?

Though still but a short time since our parting, many scenes had since transpired—many events had occurred in the life of that young creature to give it experience. Forms of equal—perhaps superior elegance—had come before her eye. Might not one of these have made its image upon her heart?

The caravan was not a mere conglomeration of coarse rude adventurers. There were men of all classes composing it—not a few of accomplished education—not a few who, using a hackneyed phrase, were 'men of the world,'

—familiar with its ways and its wiles—and who perfectly understood all those intricate attentions and delicate lures, by which the virgin heart is approached and captured.

There were military men too—those ever to be dreaded rivals in love—young officers of the escort, laced, booted, and spurred—bedecked, moreover, with that mysterious influence which authority ever imparts to its possessor.

Could these be blind to the charms of such a travelling companion? Impossible. Or could she—her young bosom just expanding to receive the god of love—fail to acknowledge the nearest form as his image? Painfully improbable!

It was therefore with feelings of no very pleasant kind that I sought around for some souvenir.

The remains of a fire, a little apart from the rest, near the edge of a piece of copsewood, drew my attention. It looked as if it had been a spot on which some family group had encamped.

I was led to this conjecture, by observing some flowers scattered near—for the grassy sward showed no other sign. The flowers betokened the presence of womankind. Fair faces—or one at least—had beamed in the light of that fire. I felt morally certain of it.

I approached the spot. The shrubbery around was interlaced with wild roses; while blue lupins and scarlet pelargoniums sparkled over the glade, under the sheltering protection of the trees. By the edge of the shrubbery lay a bouquet, that had evidently been put together with some care!

Dismounting, I took it up. My fingers trembled as I examined it: for even in this slight object I read indications of design.

The flowers were of the rarest and prettiest —of many kinds that grew not near. They had been plucked elsewhere. So e one had given both time and attention to their collection and arrangement. Who?

It would have been idle to shape even a conjecture, but for a circumstance, that appeared to offer a certain clue; and, not without bitter thoughts, did I try to unwind it.

The thread which was warped around the flower-stalks was of yellow silk. The strands were finely twisted; and I easily recognised the bullion from the tassel of a sash. That thread must have been taken from the sash of a dragoon officer!

Had the bouquet been a gift? To whom? and by whom?

Here all conjecture should have ended; but not without a feeling of painful suspicion did I examine those trivial signs; and the feeling continued to annoy me, long after I had flung the flowers at my feet.

A reflection came to my relief, which went far towards restoring my spirits' equanimity. If a gift, and to Lilian Holt, she had scarcely honoured it—else how could the flowers have been there? Had they been forgotten, or left unregarded?

There was consolation in either hypothesis; and, in the trust that one or the other was true, I sprang back into my saddle, and with a more cheerful heart, rode away from the spot.

CHAPTER XVII.

AN UNEXPECTED APPEARANCE.

The finding of the flowers, or rather the reflections to which they gave rise, rendered me more anxious than ever to come up with the caravan. The little incident had made me aware of a new danger hitherto unthought of.

Up to that hour, my chief anxiety with regard to Lilian Holt had been the companionship of the Mormon. This had been heightened by some information incidentally imparted by the deserters—chiefly by Sure-shot. It related to the destination of a number of the emigrants, who accompanied the caravan; and with whom the rifleman had held intercourse, previous to their departure from Van

Buren. These were not prospective gold-diggers, but persons migrating westward from motives more spiritual: they were *Saints* bound for the Salt Lake—there intending to stay and settle.

There was a large party of these 'Latter-day' converts under the conduct of an apostolic agent. This much had Sure-shot ascertained. He had not seen their leader, nor heard his name. Joshua Stebbins might be thevery man?

Even as a conjecture, this was bitter enough. Up to the time of joining with the deserters, I had consoled myself with the belief, that California was the destination of this saint and his squatter protégé; though at times I was troubled with the remembrance of Su-wa-nee's words. Their truth was almost confirmed by the report of the ex-rifleman. I could not now think otherwise, than that Stebbins was bound for the Mormon city; and that he was the fox in charge of the flock of geese that accompanied the emigrant train.

It was more than probable. While waiting

in Swampville for the letter of Lilian, I had learned something of the history of the *ci-devant* schoolmaster—not much of the period subsequent to his departure from that place—little more than the fact that he had joined the Mormons, and had risen to high office in their church—in short, that he was one of their 'apostles.' This fact, however, was one of primary significance.

Had the squatter also submitted to the hideous delusion? Was he also on his way to the shrine of the faith?

The answer to the former question was of slight importance, so long as that to the latter might be conceived in the affirmative. If Holt was bound to the Salt Lake, then was the fate of his daughter to be dreaded. Not long there may a virgin dwell. The baptism of the New Jordan soon initiates its female neophytes into the mysteries of womanhood—absolutely compelling them to the marriage-tie — forcing them to a wedlock loveless and unholy.

Suffering under such apprehensions, I scarcely needed the additional stimulus of

jealousy to urge me onward; and yet, strange as it may appear, the finding of the bouquet had produced this effect.

I would have ridden on, without halt, but our animals required rest. We had been travelling nearly all night, and throughout the morning—under the friendly shelter of the cotton-wood forest. We all needed an hour or two of repose; and, seeking a secure place near the ground of the deserted camp, we stopped to obtain it.

The train could not be far ahead of us. While seated in silence around the fire we had kindled, we could hear at intervals the reports of guns. They came from up the valley, and from a far distance. The sounds reached us but faintly—now single shots, and then two or three together, or following in quick succession.

We were at no loss to account for the reports. They were caused by the hunters of the caravan, in pursuit of game. We had now entered that charming region where elk and antelope abounded. On our morning-march

we had seen herds of both trooping over the sward—almost within range of our rifles. Even as we sat, a band of beautiful antelopes appeared in the open ground near our bivouack fire; and, after satisfying their curiosity by gazing at us for a moment, they trotted off into the covert.

It was a tempting sight—too tempting for the young backwoods hunter to resist. Seizing his rifle, he took after them—promising us as he went off a more savoury breakfast than the dry buffalo-meat we were broiling.

Soon after, we heard the report of his piece; and, presently, he reappeared with a dead 'prong-horn' upon his shoulders.

As Wingrove came up to the fire, I noticed a singular expression upon his countenance. Instead of being rejoiced at his success, his looks betrayed anxiety!

I questioned him as to the cause. He did not answer directly; but, drawing me to one side, inquired in a whisper, if I had seen any one in his absence.

'No. Why do you ask?'

'If it wan't altogether unpossible, I'd swar I seed that girl.'

'What girl?'

I trembled, as I put the question: I was thinking of Lilian.

'That darnationed devil of a Chicasaw.'

'What! Su-wa-nee?'

'Yes—Su-wa-nee.'

'Oh—that cannot be? It could not be her?'

'So I'd a thort myself; but darn me, capt'n! if I kin b'lieve it wa'nt her. What I seed war as like her as two eggs.'

'What did you see?'

'Why, jest arter I'd killed the goat, an' war heisting it on my shoulders, I spied a Injun glidin' into the bushes. I seed it war a squaw; an' jest the picter o' the Chicasaw. She 'peared as ef she hed kim right from hyar, an' I thort you must a seed her.'

'Did you get sight of her face?'

'No, her back war torst me, an' she kep on 'ithout turnin' or stoppin' a minnit. 'Twar the very duds that girl used to wear, an' her bulk

to an inch. It kudn't a been liker her. Darn me, ef 'twan't eyther her or her ghost!'

'It is very improbable that it could have been either?'

I did not for a moment entertain the idea that it was the Chicasaw he had seen; and yet my comrade was fully impressed with the belief, and reiterated the assertion that he had either seen Su-wa-nee or her 'shadder.'

Though the thing was improbable, it was not beyond possibility. We knew that there were Indians travelling with the train: we had heard so before starting out. But what likelihood was there of Su-wa-nee being among them? Certainly not much.

That there were prairie Indians around us, was probable enough. In fact, more than probable: it was certain. We had already observed their traces upon the ground of the deserted camp. The 'squaw' seen by Wingrove might be one of these.

Whether or not, her presence proved the proximity of red-skins; and the knowledge of having such dangerous neighbours, summoned

us to a fresh exercise of vigilance and caution.

Our fire was instantly extinguished; and, contenting ourselves with a morsel of the half-broiled buffalo-beef, we moved to some distance from the spot, before proceeding to cook the antelope.

A dark covert in the thick woods offered us a more secure kitchen. There we rekindled our fire—and roasting the ribs of the prong-horn, refreshed ourselves with an ample meal.

After an hour's repose, we resumed our journey—in confident expectation, that before sunset we should get within sight of the caravan.

CHAPTER XVIII.

UP THE CANON.

We had not ridden far from our halting-place, when we arrived at the end of the great cotton-wood forest. Beyond that, the trace led over open ground—here and there dotted by groves and 'islands' of timber.

Through these we threaded our way—keeping as much as possible among the trees.

Further on, we came upon a gorge—one of the noted *cañons* through which the Huerfano runs. Here the river sweeps down a narrow channel, with rocky banks that rise on each side into precipitous cliffs of stupendous height.

To avoid this gorge—impassable for wheeled vehicles—the waggon-trace, below its entrance,

turns off to the right; and we perceived that the caravan had taken that direction. To get round the heads of the transverse ravines, that run into the *cañon*, a detour must be made of not less than ten miles in length. Beyond the cañon—the trace once more returns to the stream.

The notes of a military reconnoissance had forewarned me of this deviation; and, furthermore that the trace passes over a ridge altogether destitute of timber. To follow it, therefore, in the broad light of day, would expose our little party to view. If hostile Indians should be hanging after the caravan, they would be sure to see us, and equally certain to make an attack upon us; and from the traces we had noticed at the night-camp—to say nothing of what Wingrove had seen—we knew there were Indians in the valley. They might not be hostile; but the chances were ten to one that they were; and, under this supposition, it would be imprudent in us to risk crossing the ridge before nightfall.

There were two alternatives: to remain

under the timber till after sunset, and then proceed by night; or to push on into the cañon, and endeavour to make our way along the bed of the stream. So far as we knew, the path was an untried one; but it might be practicable for horses.

We were now on the most dangerous ground we had yet trodden—the highway of several hostile tribes, and their favourite *tenting-place*, when going to, or returning from, their forays against the half-civilized settlements of New Mexico.

The proximity of the caravan—which we calculated to be about ten miles ahead of us—only increased our risk. There was but little danger of the Indians attacking that: the train was too strong, even without the escort. But the probability was, that a band of Indian horse-thieves would be skulking on its skirts—not to make an attack upon the caravan itself—but as wolves after a gang of buffalo, to sacrifice the stragglers. Unless when irritated by some hostile demonstration, these robbers confine themselves to plunder-

ing: but in the case of some, murder is the usual concomitant of plunder.

The delay of another night was disheartening to all of us—but especially so to myself, for reasons already known. If we should succeed in passing through the cañon, perhaps on the other side we might come in sight of the caravan?

Cheered on by this prospect, we hesitated no longer; but hastening forward, entered between the jaws of the defile.

A fearful chasm it was—the rocky walls rising perpendicularly to the height of many hundreds of feet—presenting a grim *façade* on each side of us. The sky above appeared a mere strip of blue; and we were surrounded by a gloom deeper than that of twilight. The torrent roared and foamed at our feet; and the trail at times traversed through the water.

There *was* a trail, as we soon perceived; and, what was more significant, one that had recently been travelled! Horses had been over it; and in several places the rocky peb-

bles, that should otherwise have been dry, were wet by the water that had dripped from their fetlocks. A large troop of horses must have passed just before us.

Had the dragoon escort gone that way? More likely a party of mounted travellers belonging to the train? And yet this did not strike us as being likely.

We were soon convinced that such was not the case. On riding forward, we came upon a mud deposit—at the mouth of one of the transverse ravines—over which led the trail. The mud exhibited the *tracks* distinctly and in a more significant light—they were *hoof-tracks!* We saw that more than a hundred horses had passed up the defile; and not one *shod* animal among them!

This fact was very significant. They could not have been troop-horses? Nor yet those of white men? If ridden, they must have been ridden by Indians?

It did not follow that they were ridden. We were travelling through a region frequented by the *mustang*. Droves had been seen upon

our route, at great distances off: for these are the shyest and wildest of all animals. A *caballada* may have passed through the gorge, on their way to the upper valley? There was nothing improbable in this. Although the plains are the favourite habitat of the horse, the *mustang* of Spanish America is half a mountain animal; and often penetrates the most difficult passes—climbing the declivities with hoof as sure as that of a chamois.

Had these horses been ridden? That was the point to be determined, and how?

The sign was not very intelligible, but sufficiently so for our purpose. The little belt of mud-deposit was only disturbed by a single line of tracks—crossing it directly from side to side. The animals had traversed it in single file. Wild horses would have *crowded over it*—some of them at least kicking out to one side or the other? This I myself knew.

The reasoning appeared conclusive. We had no longer a doubt that a large party of Indians had gone up the gorge before us, and not very long before us.

It now became a question of advance or retreat. To halt within the defile—even had a halting-place offered—would have been perilous above all things. There was no spot, where we could conceal either ourselves or our animals. The mounted Indians might be returning down again; and, finding us in such a snug trap, would have us at their mercy? We did not think, therefore, of staying where we were.

To go back was too discouraging. We were already half through the cañon, and had ridden over a most difficult path—often fording the stream at great risk, and climbing over boulders of rock, that imperilled the necks, both of ourselves and our animals.

We determined to keep on.

We were in hopes that the Indians had by this time passed clear through the gorge, and ridden out into the valley above. In that case, there would be no great risk in our proceeding to the upper end.

Our expectations did not deceive us. We reached the mouth of the chasm—without

having seen other signs of those who had preceded us, than the tracks of their horses.

We had heard sounds, however, that had given us some apprehension—the reports of guns—not as during the early part of the day, in single shots, but in half-dozens at a time, and once or twice in larger volleys—as if of a scattering *fusillade!*

The sounds came from the direction of the upper valley; and were but faintly heard—so faintly that we were in doubt, as to whether they were the reports of fire-arms. The grumbling and rushing of the river hindered us from hearing them more distinctly.

But for the presence of Indians in the valley—about which we were quite certain—we should perhaps not have noticed the sounds, or else have taken them for something else. Perhaps we might have conjectured, that a gang of buffaloes had passed near the train—leading to a brisk emptying of rifles. But the presence of the Indians rendered this hypothesis less probable.

We still continued to observe caution.

Before emerging from the defile, we halted near its entrance—Wingrove and myself stealing forward to reconnoitre.

An elevated post—which we obtained upon a shelf of the rock—gave us a commanding prospect of the upper valley. The sight restored our confidence: *the caravan was in view!*

CHAPTER XIX.

THE ORPHAN BUTTE.

The landscape over which we were looking was one that has long been celebrated, in the legends of trapper and *cibolero*, and certainly no lovelier is to be met with in the midland regions of America. Though new to my eyes, I recognised it from the descriptions I had read and heard of it. There was an idiosyncrasy in its features—especially in that lone mound rising conspicuously in its midst—which at once proclaimed it the valley of the *Huerfano*. There stood the 'Orphan Butte.' There was no mistaking its identity.

This valley, or, more properly, *vallé*—a

word of very different signification—is in reality a level plain, flanked on each side by a continuous line of bluffs or 'benches'—themselves forming the abutments of a still higher plain, which constitutes the general level of the country. The width between the bluffs is five or six miles; but, at the distance of some ten miles from our point of view, the cliffs converge—apparently closing in the valley in that direction. This, however, is only apparent. Above the butte is another deep cañon, through which the river has cleft its way.

The intervening space is a picture fair to behold. The surface, level as a billiard-table, is covered with *gramma* grass, of a bright, almost emerald verdure. The uniformity of this colour is relieved by cotton-wood copses, whose foliage is but one shade darker. Commingling with these, and again slightly darkening the hue of the frondage, are other trees, with a variety of shrubs or climbing-plants—as clematis, wild roses, and willows. Here and there, a noble poplar stands apart

—as if disdaining to associate with the more lowly growth of the groves.

These 'topes' are of varied forms: some rounded, some oval, and others of more irregular shape. Many of them appear as if planted by the hands of the landscape-gardener; while the Huerfano, winding through their midst, could not have been more gracefully guided, had it been specially designed for an 'ornamental water.'

The butte itself, rising in the centre of the plain, and towering nearly two hundred feet above the general level, has all the semblance of an artificial work—not of human hands, but a cairn constructed by giants. Just such does it appear—a vast pyramidal cone, composed of huge prismatic blocks of granite, black almost as coal—the dark colour being occasioned by an iron admixture in the rock.

For two-thirds of its slope, a thick growth of cedar covers the mound with a skirting of darkest green. Above this appear the dark naked prisms—piled one upon the other, in a

sort of irregular crystallisation, and ending in a summit slightly truncated.

Detached boulders lie around its base, huge pieces that, having yielded to the disintegrating influences of rain and wind, had lost their balance, and rolled down the declivity of its sides.

No other similar elevation is near—the distant bluffs alone equalling it in height. But there the resemblance ends; for the latter are a formation of stratified sandstone, while the rocks composing the butte are purely granitic! Even in a geological point of view, is the Orphan Butte isolated from all the world. In a double sense, does it merit its distinctive title.

Singular is the picture formed by this lone mound, and the park-like scene that surrounds it—a picture rare as fair. Its very framing is peculiar. The bench of light-reddish sandstone sharply outlined on each edge—the bright green of the sward along its base—and the dark belt of cedars cresting its summit, form, as it were, a double moulding to the frame. Over this can be distinguished the

severer outlines of the great Cordilleras; above them, again, the twin cones of the Wa-to-yah; and grandly towering over all, the sharp sky-piercing summit of Pike's Peak.

All these forms gleaming in the full light of a noonday sun, with a heaven above them of deep ethereal blue, present a picture that for grandeur and sublimity is not surpassed upon the earth.

A long while could we have gazed upon it; but an object, that came at once under our eyes, turned our thoughts into a far different channel.

Away up the valley, at its furthest end, appeared a small white spot—little bigger to our view than the disc of an archer's target. It was of an irregular roundish form; and on both sides of it were other shapes—smaller and of darker hue.

We had no difficulty in making out what these appearances were: the white object was the tilt of a waggon: the dark forms around it were those of men—mounted and afoot!

It must have been the last waggon of the

train : since no other could be seen ; and as it appeared at the very end of the valley—in the angle formed by the convergence of the cliffs —we concluded that there the cañon opened into which the rest had entered.

Whether the waggon seen was moving onward, we did not stay to determine. The caravan was in sight ; and this, acting upon us like an electric influence, impelled us to hasten forward.

Calling to our companions to advance, we remounted our horses, rode out of the gorge, and kept on up the valley.

We no longer observed the slightest caution. The caravan was before our eyes ; and there could be no doubt that, in a couple of hours, we should be able to come up with it.

As to danger, we no longer thought of such a thing. Indians would scarcely be so daring as to assail us within sight of the train ?

Had it been night, we might have reasoned differently ; but, under the broad light of day, we could not imagine there was the slightest prospect of danger.

We resolved, therefore, to ride direct for the waggons, without making halt.

Yes—one halt was to be made. I had promised the *ci-devant* soldiers to make *civilians* of them before bringing them face to face with the escort; and this was to be accomplished by means of some spare wardrobe which Wingrove and I chanced to have among our packs. The place fixed upon as the scene of the metamorphosis was the butte —which lay directly on our route.

As we rode forward, I was gratified at perceiving that the waggon still remained in sight. If it was moving on, it had not yet reached the head of the valley. Perhaps it had stopped to receive some repairs? So much the better: we should the sooner overtake it.

On arriving at the butte, the white canvas was still visible; though from our low position on the plain, only the top of the tilt could be seen.

While Wingrove was unpacking our spare garments, I dismounted, and climbed to the

summit of the mound—in order to obtain a better view. I had no difficulty in getting up—for, strange to say, a trail runs over the Orphan Butte, from south-east to north-west, regularly aligned with Pike's Peak in the latter direction, and with *Spanish Peaks* in the former!

But this alignment was not the circumstance that struck me as singular. A far more curious phenomenon came under my observation.

The path leading to the summit was entirely clear of the granite blocks that everywhere else covered the declivities of the mound. Between these it passed like a narrow lane, the huge prisms rising on each side of it, piled up in a regular trap-like formation, as if placed there by the hand of man!

The latter hypothesis was out of the question. Many of the blocks were a dozen feet in diameter, and tons in weight. Titans alone could have lifted them!

The summit itself was a table of some

twenty by forty feet in superficial extent, and seamed by several fissures.

Only by following the path could the summit be reached without great difficulty. The loose boulders rested upon one another, in such fashion, that even the most expert climber would have found difficulty in scaling them; and the stunted spreading cedars that grew between their clefts, combined in forming a *chevaux de frise* almost impenetrable.

I was not permitted to dwell long on the contemplation of this geological phenonon. On reaching the summit, and directing my telescope up the valley, I obtained a tableau in its field of vision that almost caused me to drop the glass out of my fingers!

The whole waggon was in view down to its wheel-tracks; and the dark forms were still around it. Some were afoot, others on horseback—while a few appeared to be lying flat along the sward.

Whoever these last may have been, I saw at the first glance what the others were. The bronzed skins of naked bodies—the masses of

long sweeping hair—the plumed crests and floating drapery—were perfectly apparent in the glass—and all indicating a truth of terrible significance—that the forms thus seen were those of savage men! Yes: both they on horseback and afoot were Indians beyond a doubt.

And those horizontally extended? They were *white* men—the owners of the waggons?

This truth flashed on me, as I beheld a fearful object—a body lying head towards me, with its crown of mottled red and white, gleaming significantly through the glass.

I had no doubt as to the nature of the object: it was a scalpless skull!

CHAPTER XX.

RAISING A RAMPART.

I KEPT the telescope to my eye not half so long as I have taken in telling of it. Quick as I saw that the men stirring around the waggon were Indians, I thought only of screening my person from their sight. To effect this, I dropped down from the summit of the rock—on the opposite side from that facing toward the savages.

Showing only the top of my head, and with the glass once more levelled up the valley, I continued the observation.

I now became assured that the victim of the ensanguined skull was a white man; that the

other prostrate forms were also the bodies of white men, all dead—all, no doubt, mutilated in a similar manner?

The tableau told its own tale. The presence of the waggon halted, and without horses —one or two dead ones lying under the tongue—the ruck of Indians clustering around it—the bodies stretched along the earth—other objects, boxes, and bales, strewed over the sward—all were significant of recent strife.

The scene explained what we had heard while coming up the cañon. The fusillade had been no fancy, but a fearful reality—fearful too in its effects, as I was now satisfied by the testimony of my telescope.

The caravan had been attacked, or, more likely, only a single waggon that had been straggling in the rear? The firing may have proceeded from the escort, or the armed emigrants? Indians may have fallen: indeed there were some prostrate forms apart, with groups gathered around them, and those I conjectured to be the corpses of red men. But it was evident the Indians had proved vic-

torious: since they were still upon the field—still holding the place and the plunder.

Where were the other waggons of the train? There were fifty of them—only one was in sight!

It was scarcely possible that the whole caravan had been captured? If so, they must have succumbed within the pass? A fearful massacre must have been made?

This was improbable: the more so, that the Indians around the waggon appeared to number near two hundred men. They must have constituted the full band: for it is rare that a war-party is larger. Those seen appeared to be all warriors, naked from the breech-clout upward, their skins glaring with pigments. Neither woman nor child could I see among them.

Had the other waggons been captured, there would not have been so many of the captors clustered around this particular one?

In all likelihood, the vehicle had been coming up behind the others? The animals drawing it had been shot down in the skir-

mish, and it had fallen into the hands of the successful assailants?

These conjectures occupied me only a moment. Mingled with them was one of still more special import: to whom had belonged the abandoned waggon?

With fearful apprehension, I covered the ground with my glass—straining my sight as I gazed through it. I swept the whole surface of the surrounding plain. I looked under the waggon—on both sides of it, and beyond. I sought amidst the masses of dusky forms. I examined the groups and stragglers — even the corpses that strewed the plain. Thank Heaven! they were all black, or brown, or red! All appeared to be *men*—both the living and the dead—thank Heaven!

The ejaculation ended my survey of the scene: it had scarcely occupied ten seconds of time.

It was interrupted by a sudden movement on the part of the savages. Those on horseback were seen separating from the rest; and,

the instant after, appeared coming on in the direction of the butte!

The movement was easily accounted for. My imprudence had betrayed our presence. I had been seen while standing on the summit of the mound!

I felt regret for my own rashness; but there was no time to indulge in the feeling, and I stifled it. The moment called for action—demanding all the firmness of nerve and coolness of head which, fortunately, I had acquired by the experience of similar crises.

Instead of shouting to my comrades—as yet unconscious of the approaching danger—I remained upon the summit without uttering a word, or showing a sign that might alarm them.

My object in so acting was to avoid the confusion, consequent upon a sudden panic, and keep my mind free to think over some plan of escape.

The Indians were still five miles off. It would be some minutes at least before they

could attack us. Two or three of these could be spared for reflection. After that, it would be time to call in the counsel of my companions.

I am here describing in detail, and with the tranquillity of closet retrospect, thoughts that followed one another with the rapidity of lightning flashes. To say that I reflected coolly, would not be true: I was at that moment too much under the influence of fear for tranquil reflection. I perceived at once that the situation was more than dangerous: it was desperate.

Flight was my first thought, or rather my first instinct: for, on reflection, it failed. The idea was to fling off the packs, mount the two pedestrians upon the mules, and gallop back for the cañon.

The conception was good enough, if it could have been carried out; but of this there was no hope. The defile was too distant to be reached in time. The two who might ride the mules could never make it—they must fall by the way.

Even if all four of us should succeed in getting back to the cañon, what then? Was it likely we should ever emerge from it? We might for a time defend ourselves within its narrow gorge; but to pass clear through and escape at the other end would be impossible. A party of our pursuers would be certain to take over the ridge, and head us below. To anticipate them in their arrival there, and reach the woods beyond, would be utterly out of our power. The trail through the cañon was full of obstacles, as we had already discovered—and these would delay us. Without a prospect of reaching the forest below, it would be of no use attempting flight.

In the valley around us there was no timbered tract—nothing that deserved the name of a wood: only copses and groves, the largest of which would not have sheltered us for an hour.

I had a reflection. Happy am I now, and proud, that I had the virtue to stifle it. For myself, escape by flight might not have been so problematical. A steed stood near that

could have carried me beyond all danger. It only needed to fling myself into the saddle, and ply the spur. Even without that impulsion, my Arab would, and could, have carried me clear of the pursuit.

Death was preferable to the thought. I could only indulge it as a last resort—after all else had failed and fallen. Three men were my companions, true and tried. To all of them, I owed some service—to one little less than my life—for the bullet of the eccentric ranger had once saved me from an enemy. It was I who had brought on the impending attack. It was but just I should share its danger; and the thought of shunning it vanished on the instant of its conception.

Escape by flight appeared hopeless. On the shortest survey of the circumstances I perceived that our only chance lay in defending ourselves. The chance was not much worth; but there was no alternative. We must stand and fight, or fall without resisting. From such a foe as that coming down upon us, we

need expect no grace—not a modicum of mercy.

Where was our defence to be made? On the summit of the butte?

There was no better place in sight—no other that could be reached, offering so many advantages. Had we chosen it for a point of defence, it could not have promised better for the purpose.

As already stated, the cone was slightly truncated—its top ending in a *mesa*. The table was large enough to hold four of us. By crouching low, or lying flat upon it, we should be screened from the arrows of the Indians, or such other weapons as they might use. On the other hand the muzzles of four guns pointed at *them*, would deter them from approaching the base of the butte.

Scarcely a minute was I in maturing a plan; and I lost less time in communicating it to my companions.

Returning to them, as fast as I could make the descent, I announced the approach of the Indians.

The announcement produced a surprise sufficiently unpleasant, but no confusion. The old soldiers had been too often under fire to be frightened out of their senses at the approach of an enemy; and the young hunter was not one to give way to a panic. All three remained cool and collected, as they listened to my hurried detail of the plan I had sketched out for our defence.

There was no difficulty in inducing them to adopt it. All agreed to it eagerly and at once: in short, all saw that there was no alternative.

Up the mound again—this time followed by my three comrades—each of us heavily laden. In addition to our guns and ammunition, we carried our saddles and mule-packs, our blankets and buffalo robes.

It was not their intrinsic value that tempted us to take this trouble with our *impedimenta:* our object was to make with them a rampart upon the rock.

We had just time for a second trip; and,

flinging our first loads up to the table, we rushed back down the declivity.

Each seized upon such objects as offered themselves—valises, the soldiers' knapsacks, joints of the antelope lately killed, and the noted meal-bag—all articles likely to avail us in building our bulwark.

The animals must be abandoned—both horses and mules. Could we take them up to tbe summit? Yes, the thing could be accomplished, but to what purpose? It would be worse than useless: since it would only render them an aim for the arrows of the enemy, and insure their being shot down at once. To leave them below appeared the better plan.

A tree stood near the base of the mound. To its branches their bridles had been already looped. There they would be within easy range of our rifles. We could shelter them so long as there was light.

To protect them might appear of little advantage; since in the darkness they could be easily taken from us. But in leaving them thus,

we were not without some design. We, too, might build a hope on the darkness. If we could succeed in sustaining the attack until nightfall, flight might *then* avail us. In truth, that seemed the only chance we should have of ultimately escaping from our perilous situation.

We resolved, therefore, to look well to the safety of the animals. Though forced to forsake them for a time, we might still keep the enemy off, and again recover them?

The contingency was not clear, and we were too much hurried to dwell long upon it. It only flitted before our minds like a gleam of light through the misty future.

I had just time to bid farewell to my Arab —to run my fingers along his smooth arching neck—to press my lips to his velvet muzzle. Brave steed! tried and trusty friend! I could have wept at the parting.

He made answer to my caresses: he answered them with a low whimpering neigh. He knew there was something amiss—that there was danger. Our hurried movements

had apprised him of it; but the moment after, his altered attitude, his flashing eyes, and the loud snorting from his spread nostrils, told that he perfectly comprehended the dan . He heard the distant trampling of hoofs: he knew that an enemy was approaching.

I heard the sounds myself, and rushed back up the butte. My companions were already upon the summit, busied in building the rampart around the rock. I joined them, and aided them in the work.

Our *paraphernalia* proved excellent for the purpose—light enough to be easily handled, and sufficiently firm to resist either bullets or arrows.

Before the Indians had come within hailing distance, the parapet was completed; and, crouching behind it, we awaited their approach.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE WAR-CRY.

The war-cry 'How-ow-owgh-aloo-loo-oo!' uttered loudly from a hundred throats, comes pealing down the valley. Its fiendish notes, coupled with the demon-like forms that give utterance to them, are well calculated to quail the stoutest heart.

Ours are not without fear. Though we know that the danger is not immediate, there is a significance in the tones of that wild slogan. They express more than the usual hostility of red to white—they breathe a spirit of vengeance.

The gestures of menace—the brandished spears, and bended bows—the war-clubs wav-

ing in the air—are all signs of the excited anger of the Indians. Blood has been spilled—perhaps the blood of some of their chosen warriors—and ours will be sought to a certainty. We perceive no signs of a pacific intent—no semblance that would lead us to hope for mercy. The foe is bent on our destruction. He rushes forward to kill!

I have said that the danger was not immediate. I did not conceive it so. My conception was based upon experience. I had met the prairie Indians before—in the south; but north or south, I knew that their tactics were the same.

It is a mistake to suppose that these savages rush recklessly upon death. Only when their enemy is far inferior to them in numbers—or otherwise an undermatch—will they advance boldly to the fight. They will do this in an attack upon Mexicans, whose prowess they despise; or sometimes in a conflict with their own kind—when stimulated by warrior pride, and the promptings of the tribal vendetta. On other occasions, they are sufficiently care-

ful of their skins—more especially in an encounter with the white trappers, or even travellers who enter the prairies from the east. Of all other weapons, they dread the long rifle of the hunter. It is only after stratagem has failed—when *do or die* becomes a necessity—that the horse-Indian can bring himself to charge forward upon the glistening barrel. The mere hope of plunder will not tempt even the boldest of red-skinned robbers within the circle of a rifle's range. They all know from experience the deadliness of its aim.

Most probably plunder had been their motive for attacking the train; but their victims could only have been some straggling unfortunates, too confident in their security. These had not succumbed without a struggle. The death of all of them proved this: since not a prisoner appeared to have been taken. Further evidence of it was seen upon the sward; for as the crowd scattered, I observed through the glass several corpses that were not those of white men. The robbers, though victorious, had suffered severely: hence the vengeful

yells with which they were charging down upon us.

With all their menace both of signs and sounds, I had no fear of their charging up the mound, nor yet to its base. There were fifty yards around it within range of our guns; and the first who should venture within this circle would not be likely to go forth from it alive.

'Not a shot is to be fired, till you are sure of hitting! Do not one of you pull trigger, till you have sighted your man!' This was the order passed around.

On the skill of two of my comrades I could confide—on Sure-shot with all the certainty which his *soubriquet* expressed; and I had seen enough of the young hunter, to know how he handled his rifle. About the Irishman alone was there a doubt—only of his coolness and his aim—of his courage there was none. In this, the 'infantry' was perhaps equal to any of us.

The words of caution had scarcely parted from my lips, when the enemy came galloping

up. Their yelling grew louder as they advanced; and its echoes, ringing from the rocks, appeared to double the number of their wild vociferations.

We could only hear one another by calling out at the top of our voices. But we had little to say. The time for talking had expired: that of action had arrived.

On come the whooping savages, horrid to behold: their faces, arms, and bodies frightfully painted, each after his own device, and all as hideous as savage conception can suggest. The visages of bears, wolves, and other fierce animals, are depicted on their breasts and shields—with the still more horrid emblems of the death's head, the cross-bones, and the red hand. Even their horses are covered with similar devices—stained upon their skins in ochre, charcoal, and vermilion! The sight is too fearful to be fantastic.

On they come, uttering their wild 'Howgh-owgh-aloo!' brandishing their various weapons, and making their shields of *parfleche* rattle

by repeated strokes against their clubs and spears—on comes the angry avalanche!

They are within a hundred yards of the butte. For a moment, we are in doubt. If they charge up the declivity, we are lost men. We may shoot down the foremost; but they are twenty to one. In a hand-to-hand struggle, we shall be overwhelmed—killed or captured—in less than sixty seconds of time!

'Hold your fire!' I cried, seeing my comrades lie with their cheeks against their guns; 'not yet! only two at a time—but not yet! Ha! as I expected.'

And just as I had expected, the wild ruck came to a halt—those in the lead drawing up their horses, as suddenly as if they had arrived upon the edge of a precipice!

They had come to a stand just in the nick of time. Had they advanced but five paces further, at least two of their number would have tumbled out of their saddles. Sure-shot and I had each selected our man, and agreed upon the signal to fire. The others were ready to follow.

All four barrels resting over the rampart had caught the eyes of the Indians. A glance at the glistening tubes was sufficient. True to their old tactics, it was the sight of these that had halted them!

CHAPTER XXII.

THE RED HAND.

The whooping and screaming are for a while suspended. Those in the rear have ridden up; and the straggling cavalcade becomes massed upon the plain, at less than two hundred yards' distance from the butte.

Shouts are still heard, and talking in an unknown tongue; but not the dread war-cry. That has failed of its effect; and is heard no longer.

Now and then, young warriors gallop toward the butte, vaunt their valour, brandish their weapons, shoot off their arrows, and threaten us by word and gesture. All, however, keep well outside the perilous circumference covered by our guns.

We perceive that they, too, have guns, both muskets and rifles—in all, a dozen or more! We can tell that they are empty. Those who carry them are dismounting to load.

We may expect soon to receive their fire; but, from the clumsy manner in which they handle their pieces, that need not terrify us—any more than their arrows, already sent, and falling far short.

Half-a-dozen horsemen are conspicuous. They are chiefs, as can be told by the eagle plumes sticking in their hair, with other insignia on their breasts and bodies.

These have ridden to the front, and are grouped together—their horses standing head to head. Their speeches and gesticulations declare that they are holding council.

The movements of menace are no longer made.

We have time to examine our enemies. They are so near that I need scarcely level the glass upon them; though through it, I can note every feature with minute distinctness.

They are not Comanches. Their bodies are too big, and their limbs too long, for these Ishmaelites of the southern plains. Neither are they of the Jicarilla-Apache: they are too noble-looking to resemble these skulking jackals. More like are they to the Caygüas? But no—they are not Caygüas. I have met these Indians, and should know them. The war-cry did not resemble theirs. Theirs is the war-cry of the Comanche. I should have known it at once. Cheyennes they may be—since it is their especial ground? Or might it be that tribe of still darker, deadlier fame—the hostile Arapaho? If they be Arapahoes, we need look for no mercy.

I sweep the glass over them, seeking for signs by which I may identify our enemy. I perceive one that is significant. The leggings of the chiefs and principal warriors are fringed with scalps; their shields are encircled by similar ornaments. Most of these appendages are of dark hue—the locks long and black. But not all are of this kind or colour.

One shield is conspicuously different from

the rest. A red hand is painted upon its black disc. It is the *totem* of him who carries it. A thick fringe of hair is set around its rim. The tufts are of different lengths and colours. There are tresses of brown, blonde, and even red; hair curled and wavy; coarse hair; and some soft and silky. Through the glass, I see all this, with a clearness that leaves no doubt as to the character of these varied *chevelures*. They are the scalps of whites—both of men and women!

And the red hand upon the shield? A red hand? Ah! I remember. There is a noted chief of the name, famed for his hostility to the trappers—famed for a ferocity unequalled among his race—a savage who is said to take delight in torturing his captives—especially if it be a pale-face who has had the misfortune to fall into his hands. Can it be that fiend—the Red-Hand of the Arapahoes?

The appearance of the man confirms my suspicion. A body, tall, angular, and ill-shaped, scarred with cicatrized wounds, and bent with age; a face seamed with the traces

of evil passion; eyes deep sunken in their sockets, and sparkling like coals of fire—an aspect more fiendlike than human! All this agrees with the descriptions I have had of the Red-Hand chief. Assuredly it is he.

Our enemies, then, are the Arapahoes—their leader the dreaded *Red-Hand.*

'Heaven have mercy upon us! These men will have none!'

Such was the ejaculation that escaped my lips, on recognising, or believing that I recognised, the foe that was before us.

The Red-Hand is seen to direct. He is evidently leader of the band. All seem obedient to his orders; all move with military promptness at his word or nod. Beyond doubt, it is the Red-Hand and his followers, who for crimes and cold-blooded atrocities are noted as he. A dreaded band, long known to the traders of Santa Fé—to the *ciboleros* from the Taos Valley—to the trappers of the Arkansas and Platte.

We are not the first party of white men besieged by these barbarous robbers; and if

it be our fate to fall, we shall not be their first victims. Many a brave 'mountain-man' has already fallen into their fiendish grasp. Scarcely a trapper who cannot tell of some comrade, who has been 'rubbed' out by Red-Hand and his 'Rapahoes.'

The council of the chiefs continues for some time. Some *ruse* is being devised and debated among them.

With palpitating hearts we await the issue.

I have made known my suspicions as to who is our enemy, and cautioned my comrades to be on their guard. I have told them that, if my conjecture prove true, we need look for no mercy.

The talk is at an end. Red-Hand is about to address us.

Riding two lengths in front of his followers, the savage chief makes halt.

His shield is held conspicuously upward—its convexity towards us—not for any purpose of security; but evidently that we may see its device, and know the bearer. Red-Hand is conscious of the terror inspired by his name.

In his other hand, he carries an object better calculated than the shield to beget fearful emotions. Poised on the point of his long spear, and held high aloft, are the scalps recently taken.

There are six of them in the bunch—easily told by the different hues of the hair; and all easily identified as those of white men. They are the scalps of the slain teamsters, and others who had vainly attempted to defend the captured waggon. They are all fresh and gory —hang limber along the shaft. The blood is not yet dry upon them—the wet surface glitters in the sun!

We view them with singular emotions—mine perhaps more singular than any. I endeavour to identify some of those ghastly trophies. I am but too satisfied at failing.

CHAPTER XXIII.

AN ILL-TIMED SHOT.

"*Hablo Castellano?*' cries the savage chieftain in broken Spanish.

I am not surprised at being addressed in this language by a prairie Indian. Many of them speak Spanish, or its North Mexican *patois*. They have opportunities of learning it from the new Mexican traders, but better—*from their captives.*

'*Si cavallero!* I speak Spanish. What wishes the warrior with the red hand upon his shield?'

'The pale-face is a stranger in this country, else he would not ask such a question? What

wishes the Red-Hand? Ha, ha, ha! The scalps of the white men—their scalps and lives—that is the will of the Arapaho chief!'

The speech is delivered in a tone of exultation, and accompanied by a scornful laugh. The savage is proud of his barbarous and bloodthirsty character: he glories in the terror of his name! With such a monster, it seems idle to hold parley. In the end, it will be only to fight, and if defeated, to die.

But the drowning man cannot restrain himself from catching even at strasw.

'Arapaho! we are not your enemies! Why should you desire to take our lives? We are peaceful travellers passing through your country; and have no wish to quarrel with our red brothers.'

'Red brothers! ha, ha, ha! Tongue of a serpent, and heart of a hare! The proud Arapaho is not your brother: he disclaims kindred with a pale-face. Red-Hand has no brothers among the whites: all are alike his enemies! Behold their scalps upon his shield! Ugh! See the fresh trophies upon his spear!

Count them! There are six! There will be ten. Before the sun goes down, the scalps of the four squaws skulking on the mound will hang from the spears of the Arapahoes!'

I could not contradict the declaration: it was too fearfully probable.

I made no reply.

'Dogs!' fiercely vociferated the savage, 'come down, and deliver up your arms!'

'An' our scalps teo, I s'pose,' muttered the Yankee. 'Neo, certingly not, at your price: I don't sell my notions so dirt cheep as thet comes to. 'Twouldn't pay nohow. Lookee yeer, old red gloves!' continued he in a louder voice, and raising his head above the rampart—'this heer o' mine air vallable, do ee see? It air a rare colour, an' a putty colour. It 'ud look jest the thing on thet shield o' yourn; but 'tain't there yet, not by a long chalk; an' I kalklate ef ye want the skin o' my head, ye'll hev to trot up an take it.'

'Ugh!' ejaculated the Indian with an impatient gesture. 'The yellow squaw is

not worth the words of a chief. His scalp is not for the shield of a warrior. It will be given to the dogs of our tribe. It will be thrown to the jackals of the prairie.'

'Ain't partickler abeout what 'ee do wi' 't —thet is, efter ye've got it. Don't ye wish 'ee may git it? eh?'

'Wagh!' exclaimed the savage, with another impatient gesticulation. 'The Red-Hand is tired talking. One word more. Listen to it, chief of the pale-faces! Come down, and deliver up your fire-weapons! The Red-Hand will be merciful: he will spare your lives. If you resist, he will torture you with fire. The knives of his warriors will hew the living flesh from your bones. You shall die an hundred deaths; and the Great Spirit of the Arapahoes will smile at the sacrifice!'

'And what if we do not resist?'

'Your lives shall be spared. The Red-Hand declares it on the faith of a warrior.'

'Faith o' a warrior!—faith o' a cut-throat! He only wants to come round us, capting, an' git our scalps 'ithout fightin' for em—thet's

what the red verming wants to be at—sure as shootin'.'

'Why should the Red-Hand spare our lives?' I inquired, taken by surprise at any offer of life coming from such a quarter. 'Has he not just said, that all white men are his enemies?'

'True. But white men may become his friends. He wants white men for his allies. He has a purpose.'

'Will the Red-Hand declare his purpose?'

'Freely. His people have taken many fire-weapons. See! they are yonder in the hands of his braves, who know not how to use them. Our enemies—the Utahs—have been taught by the white hunters; and the ranks of the Arapaho warriors are thinned by their deadly bullets. If the pale-faced chief and his three followers will consent to dwell with the band of Red-Hand, and teach his warriors the great medicine of the fire-weapon, their lives shall be spared. The Red-Hand will honour the young soldier-chief, and the White Eagle of the forest.'

'Soldier-chief! White Eagle of the forest! How can he have known'——

'If you resist,' continued he, interrupting my reflections, 'the Red-Hand will keep his word. You have no chance of escape. You are but four, and the Arapaho warriors are numerous as the trees of the Big Timber. If one of them fall by your fire-weapons, he shall be revenged. The Red-Hand repeats what he has said: the knives of his braves will hew the living flesh from your bones. You shall die an hundred deaths, and the Great Spirit of the Arapahoes will smile at the sacrifice!'

'Be Jaysis, cyaptin!' cried O'Tigg, who, not understanding Spanish, was ignorant of what had been said, 'that ugly owld Indyan wants a bit ov cowld lid through him. In troth, I b'lave the musket moight raich him. She belonged to Sargent Johnson, an' was considhered the longest raich gun about the Fort. What iv I throy her carry on the ridskin? Say the word, yer honour, an' here goes!'

So astounded was I at the last words of the Arapaho chief, that I paid no heed to what the Irishman was saying. I had turned towards Wingrove—not for an explanation: for the young hunter, also ignorant of the language in which the Indian spoke, was unaware of the allusion that had been made to him.

I had commenced translating the speech; but, before three words had escaped my lips, the loud bang of a musket drowned every other sound; and a cloud of sulphureous smoke covering the whole platform, hindered us from seeing one another!

It needed no explanation. The Irishman had taken my silence for consent: he had fired!

From the thick of the smoke came his exulting shout:

'Hooray! he's down—be my sowl! he's down! I knew the owld musket 'ud raich him! Hooray!'

The report reverberated from the rocks—mingling its echoes with the wild vengeful cries that came pealing up from the plain.

In an instant, the smoke was wafted aside; and the painted warriors were once more visible.

The Red-Hand was erect upon his feet, standing by the side of his horse, and still holding his spear and shield. The horse was down—stretched along the turf, and struggling in the throes of death!

'Be gorrah! cyaptin! wasn't it a splindid shat?'

'A shot that may cost us our scalps,' said I: for I saw that there was no longer any chance of a pacific arrangement—even upon the condition of our making sharpshooters of every redskin in the tribe.

'Ha, ha, ha!' came the wild laugh of the Arapaho. 'Vengeance on the pale-faced traitors! vengeance!'

And shaking his clenched fist above his head, the savage chief retired among his warriors.

CHAPTER XXIV.

ATTEMPT TO STAMPEDE.

We made an attempt to reopen the interrupted parley. In vain. Whatever amicable design the Red-Hand might have conceived was now changed to a feeling of the most deadly hostility. There was no more 'talk' to be drawn from him—not a word. In the midst of his warriors, he stood scowling and silent. Neither did any of the chiefs deign to reply. The common braves made answers to our overtures; but only by the insult of a peculiar gesture. Any hopes we might have conceived of a pacific termination to the encounter, died within us as we noted the behaviour of the band.

Whether the Indian was in earnest in the proposal he had made, or whether it was a mere scheme to get our scalps without fighting for them, we could not tell at the time. There was an air of probability that he was honest about the matter; but, on the other hand, his notorious character for hostility to the white race contradicted this probability. I had heard, moreover, that this same chief was in the habit of adopting such stratagems to get white men into his power.

We had no time to speculate upon the point; nor yet upon that which puzzled us far more—how he had arrived at the knowledge of who we were! What could he have known of the 'White Eagle of the forest,' or the 'young soldier-chief?'

So far as I was myself concerned, the title might have been explained. My uniform—I still wore it—might have been espied upon the prairies? The Indians are quick at catching an appellation, and communicating it to one another.

But the figurative soubriquet of the young

hunter? That was more specific. The Red-Hand could not have used it accidentally? Impossible. It bespoke a knowledge of us, and our affairs, that appeared mysterious and inexplicable.

It did not fail to recall to our memory the apparition that had astonished Wingrove in the morning.

There was no opportunity to discuss the question. We had only time for the most vague conjectures—before the savages began to fire at us—discharging in rapid succession the guns which they had loaded.

We soon perceived that we had little to fear from this sort of attack. Unless by some stray bullet, there was not much danger of their hitting us. Their clumsy *manège* of the fire-weapon was evident enough. It added to the probability, that the chief had been in earnest about our giving instructions to his warriors.

Still was there some degree of danger. The guns they had got hold of were large ones—most of them old muskets of heavy calibre—that cast their ounces of lead to a long dis-

tance. We heard their bullets pattering against the rocks, and one or two of them had passed whistling over our heads. It was just possible to get hit; and, to avoid such an accident, we crouched behind our parapet, as closely as if we had been screening ourselves from the most expert marksmen.

For a long time we did not return their fire. O'Tigg was desirous of trying another shot with his piece, but I forbade it. Warned by what they had witnessed, the Indians had retired beyond even the range of the serjeant's fusil.

* * * *

Two parties of savages now separate from the main body; and, taking opposite directions, go sweeping at full gallop round the butte.

We divine their object. They have discovered the position of our animals: the intention is to *stampede* them.

We perceive the importance of preventing this. If we can but keep our animals out of the hands of the savages until darkness come down, then may there be some prospect of our

escaping by flight. True, it is only a faint hope. There are many contingencies by which the design may be defeated, but there are also circumstances to favour it; and to yield without a struggle, would only be to deliver ourselves into the hands of an unpitying foe. The last words uttered by the Arapaho chief have warned us that death will be preferable to captivity.

We are sustained by another remembrance. We know that we are not the first white men who have been thus surrounded, and who afterwards contrived to escape. Many a small band of brave trappers have sustained the attack of a whole Indian tribe; and though half of their number may have fallen, the others lived to relate the perilous adventure. The life of a determined man is difficult to take. A desperate sortie often proves the safest defence; and three or four resolute arms will cut a loophole of escape through a host of enemies.

Some such thoughts, flitting before us, hinder us from succumbing to despair.

It was of the utmost importance, to prevent our animals from being swept off; and to this end were our energies now directed. Three of us faced towards them—leaving the fourth to watch the movements of the enemy on the other side of the butte.

Once more the wild cry rings among the rocks, as the red horsemen gallop around—rattling their shields, and waving their weapons high in the air. These demonstrations are made to affright our animals, and cause them to break from their fastenings.

They have not the desired effect. The mules prance and hinnie; the horses neigh and bound over the grass; but the long boughs bend without breaking; and acting as elastic springs, give full play to the affrighted creatures. Not a rein snaps—not a lazo breaks —not a loop slides from its hold!

The first skurry is over; and we are gratified to see the four quadrupeds still grouped around the tree, and fast as ever to its branches.

The *stampede* has proved a failure.

Another swoop of the wild horsemen ends with like result; and then another.

And now closer and closer they come—galloping in all directions, crossing and meeting, and wheeling and circling—with shrill screams and violent gesticulations.

As they pass near they shelter themselves behind the bodies of their horses. An arm over the withers, a leg above the croup—are all of the riders we can see. It is useless to fire at these. The horses we might tumble over at pleasure; but the men offer no point to aim at. At intervals a red face gleams through the tossing locks of the mane; but, ere we can take sight upon it, it is jerked away.

For a considerable time, this play is kept up—the Indians all the while yelling as if engaged in some terrible conflict.

As to ourselves, we are too wary to waste our shots upon the horses; and we reserve them, in the hope of being able to 'draw a bead' on some rider more reckless than the rest.

The opportunity soon offers. Two of the savages exhibit a special determination to succeed in snatching away the horses. Knife in hand, they career around—evidently with the design of cutting the bridles and lazoes. Cheered on by the shouts of their comrades, they grow less careful of their skins, and at length make a dash towards the group under the tree.

When almost within hand-reach of the fastenings by which the mules are held, one of the latter slews suddenly round, and sends her heels in a well-directed fling against the head of the foremost horse!

The steed instantly wheels, and the other coming behind follows the same movement—exposing both the riders to our aim.

They make an effort to throw themselves to the other side of their animals; but the opportunity is lost. Our rifles are too quick for them. Two of us fire at the same instant; and as the smoke clears away, the red robbers are seen sprawling upon the plain.

Our shots have proved fatal. Before we

can reload, the struggles of the fallen horsemen have ended; and both lie motionless upon the grass.

* * * *

The lesson was sufficient for the time. Warned by the fate of their comrades, the Indians, although still continuing their noisy demonstrations, now kept well out of the range of our rifles. There appeared to be no others in the band, desirous of achieving fame at such risk of life.

CHAPTER XXV.

OUR WEAK POINT.

For some time the savage horsemen continued their circling gallop around the butte—one occasionally swooping nearer; but covered by the body of his horse, in such a way that it was impossible to sight him.

These manœuvres were executed by the young warriors—apparently in a spirit of bravado, and with the design of showing off their courage and equestrian skill.

We disregarded the harmless demonstrations—watching them only when made in the direction of our animals.

At intervals, a hideous face, peeping over the withers of a horse, offered a tempting

target. My comrades would have tried a flying shot had I not restrained them. A miss would have damaged our prestige in the eyes of the enemy. It was of importance that they should continue to believe in the infallibility of the fire-weapon.

After a time, we observed a change of tactics. The galloping slackened, and soon came to an end. The horsemen threw themselves into small groups—at nearly equal distances apart, and forming a ring round the butte. Most of the riders then dismounted—a few only remaining upon their horses, and continuing to dash backward and forward, from group to group.

These groups were beyond the range of our rifles, though not of the sergeant's musket. But the savages—both mounted and afoot—had taken care to make ramparts of their steeds.

At first, this manœuvre of our enemies appeared to have no other object than that of placing themselves in a position to guard against our retreat.

A moment's reflection, however, told us that this could not be the design. There were but two points by which we could pass down to the plain—on opposite sides of the butte—why then should they *surround* it?

It could not be for the purpose of cutting off our retreat? That could be done as effectually without the circular deployment.

Their design soon became apparent. We observed that the muskets were distributed among the groups—three or four to each.

With these they now opened fire upon us from all sides at once—keeping it up as fast as they could load the pieces.

The effect was to render our situation a little more perilous. Not having the means to make our parapet continuous, we were at several points exposed. Had we had good marksmen to deal with, we should have been in danger. As it was, we drew well back towards the centre of the platform; and were screened by its outer angles.

Now and then a shot struck the rock, send-

ing the splinters in our faces; but all four of us escaped being hit by the bullets.

We had made an observation that rendered us uneasy: we had observed a weak point in our defence. We wondered that our assailants had not also noticed it.

Around the butte, and close up to its base, lay many boulders of rock. They were prisms of granite, that had become detached from the cairn itself, and rolled down its declivity. They rested upon the plain, forming a ring concentric with the circular base of the mound. Many of these boulders had a diameter of six feet, and would have sheltered the body of a man from our shots. Others, again, rested along the sloping sides of the butte—also of prismatic shapes, with sides overhanging. These might form ramparts for our assailants should they attempt to storm our position. Even the spreading cedars would have hidden them from our sight. They were the trailing juniper of the western wilds—very different from the Virginian cedar. They were of broad bushy forms, with stunted stems, and tortuous

branches, densely set with a dark acetalous foliage. They covered the sides of the butte, from base to middle height, with a draping perfectly impenetrable to the eye. Though there was no path save that already mentioned, assailants, active as ours, might unseen have scaled the declivity.

Should the Indians make a bold dash up to the base of the butte, leave their horses, and take to the rocks, they might advance upon us without risk. While working their way up the slope, they would be safe from our shots, sheltered by the projecting prisms, and screened by the trees. We should not dare to expose ourselves over the edge of the platform: since the others, remaining behind the boulders below, would cover us with their aim; and the shower of arrows would insure our destruction. Those who might scale the mound, would have us at their mercy. Assailing us simultaneously from all sides, and springing suddenly upon the platform, ten to one against us, they could soon overpower us.

These were the observations we had made,

and the reflections that resulted from them. We only wondered that our enemies had not yet perceived the advantage of this plan of attack; and, since they had neglected it so long, we were in hopes that the idea would not occur to them at all.

It was not long before we perceived our error; and that we had miscalculated the cunning of our dusky foes. We saw the Indians once more taking to their horses. Some order had reached them from the Red-Hand, who stood conspicuous in the midst of the largest group of his warriors.

The movement that resulted from this order was similar to that already practised in the endeavour to stampede our animals: only that all the band took part in it—even the chiefs mounting and riding among the rest. The marksmen alone remained afoot, and continued to fire from behind their horses.

* * * *

Once more the mounted warriors commence galloping in circles round the butte. We perceive that at each wheel they are

coming nearer, and can divine their intent. It is the very plan of attack we have been apprehending! We can tell by their gestures that they are about to charge forward to the rocks.

Regardless of the fire from the plain, we creep back to the edge of the parapet, and point our pieces towards the circling horsemen. We are excited with new apprehensions; but the caution to keep cool is once more passed around; and each resolves not to fire without being certain of his aim. On our first shots will depend the success or failure of the attack.

As before, we arrange that two only shall fire at a time. If the shots prove true, and two of our foes fall to them, it may check the charge, perhaps repulse it altogether? Such often happens with an onset of Indians—on whom the dread of the fire-weapon acts with a mysterious effect.

On the other hand, if we miss, our fate is sealed and certain. We shall not even have the choice of that last desperate resort, on

which we have built a hope. We shall be cut off from all escape: for our animals will be gone before we can reach them. On foot, it will be idle to attempt flight. Even could we run the gauntlet through their line, we know they could overtake us upon the plain!

We feel like men about to throw dice for our lives, and dice too that are loaded against us!

Nearer and nearer they come, until they are coursing within fifty yards of the butte, and scarcely twice that distance from our guns. Were their bodies uncovered, we could reach them; but we see only their hands, feet, and faces—the latter only at intervals.

They draw nearer and nearer, till at length they are riding within the circle of danger.

Our superior elevation gives us the advantage. We begin to see their bodies over the backs of their horses. A little nearer yet, and some of these horses will go riderless over the plain!

Ha! they have perceived their danger—one and all of them. Notwithstanding their

cries of bravado, and mutual encouragement, they dread to make the final rush. Each fears that himself may be the victim!

* * * *

Our heads were growing dizzy with watching them, and we were still expecting to see some of them turn their horses, and dash inward to the butte; when we heard a signal-cry circulating through their ranks. All at once the foremost of them was seen swerving off, followed by the whole troop!

Before we could recover from our surprise, they had galloped far beyond the range of our guns, and once more stood halted upon the plain!

CHAPTER XXVI.

A RAMPART ON WHEELS.

For a time, our hearts throbbed more lightly: the pressure of apprehension was removed. We fancied the savages had either not yet become fully aware of the advantage of storming our position, or that the certainty of losing some of their number had intimidated them from making the attempt. They had abandoned their design, whatever it was; and intended waiting for night—the favourite fighting-time of the Indian.

This was just what we desired; and we were congratulating ourselves that the prospect had changed in our favour.

Our joy was short-lived: the enemy showed

no sign of repose. Clustered upon the plain, they still kept to their horses. By this, we knew that some other movement was intended.

The chiefs were again in the centre of the crowd: the Red-Hand conspicuous. He was heard haranguing his warriors, though we could not guess the purport of his speech. His gestures told of fierce rage—his glances, now and then directed towards us, betokened a spirit of implacable vengeance.

At the conclusion of his speech, he waved his hand in the direction of the waggon. The gesture appeared to be the accompaniment of a command.

It was promptly and instantly obeyed. A dozen horsemen dashed out from the group, and galloped off. Their course was straight up the valley—towards the scene of their late strife.

Those who had remained upon the ground dismounted, and were seen giving their horses to the grass.

This might have led us to anticipate a

suspension of hostilities, but it did not. The attitude of our enemies was not that of purposed repose. On the contrary, they came together afoot; and engaged in what appeared to be an eager consultation. The chiefs spoke in turn. Some new scheme was being discussed.

We watched the party who had ridden off.

As anticipated, the waggon proved to be the *butt* of their excursion.

Having reached it, they halt; and, dismounting, become grouped around it.

It is impossible for some time to tell what they are doing. Even the glass does not reveal the nature of their movements. There are others besides those who rode up; and the white tilt appears in the midst of a dark cluster of men and horses.

Their errand at length becomes obvious. The crowd is seen to scatter. Horses appear harnessed to the tongue—the wheels are in motion—the vehicle is turning round upon the plain. We see that some half-dozen

horses are hitched on, with men seated upon their backs as teamsters!

They make a wheel, and head down the valley in the direction of the butte. They are seen urging the animals into a rapid pace. The waggon, no longer loaded, leaps lightly over the smooth sward.

The horses are spurred into a gallop; and amidst the shouts of the savage drivers, drag the huge vehicle after them with the rough rapidity of a mountain howitzer.

In a few minutes, it advances to the ground occupied by the dismounted band, who surround it upon its arrival.

We upon the summit have a full view of all. We recognise the well known Troy waggon—with its red wheels, blue body, and ample canvas roof. The lettering, 'Troy, New York,' is legible on the tilt—a strange sight in the midst of its present possessors!

What can be their object with the waggon?

Their actions leave us not long in doubt. The horses are unharnessed and led aside. Half-a-dozen savages are seen crouching under

the axles, and laying hold of the spokes. As many more stand behind—screened from our sight by the tilt-cloth, the body, and boxing. The pole projects in the direction of the mound!

Their object is now too painfully apparent. Without thinking of the analogy of the Trojan horse, we see that this monster of a modern Troy is about to be employed for a similar purpose.

Yes—shielded by the thick planking of its bed—by its head and hind boards—by its canvas covering, and other cloths which they have cunningly spread along its sides, the savages may approach the mound in perfect safety. Such is their design.

With dismay, we perceive it. We can do nought either to retard or hinder its execution. Those under the vehicle can 'spoke' the wheels forward, without in the least exposing their bodies to our aim. Even their hands and arms are not visible: buffalo robes and blankets hang over, draping the wheels from our view. Those behind are equally well

screened; and can propel the huge machine, without risk of danger.

We note all these circumstances with feelings of keen apprehension. We adopt no means to hinder the movement: we can think of none, since none is possible. We are paralysed by a sense of our utter helplessness.

We are allowed but little time to reflect upon it. Amidst the shouts of the savages, we hear the creaking of the wheels; we behold the mass in motion!

Onward it comes towards the mound—advancing with apparently spontaneous motion, as if it were some living monster—some horrid mammoth—approaching to destroy and devour us!

* * * *

Had it been such a monster, its proximity could scarce have inspired us with a greater dread. We felt that our destruction was equally certain. The savages would now surround us—advance up the rocks—spring upon us from all sides at once; and, although we

might fight to the death—which we had determined to do—still must we die.

The knowledge that we should die fighting, and with arms in our hands—that we should fall upon the corpses of our enemies, avenging death before parting with life—this knowledge was but a feeble ray to support and cheer us. Though no cowards—not one of us—we could not look forward to our fate, without a feeling of dread.

The certainty of that fate we could no longer question. Even the time seemed to be fixed. In a few minutes, the assailants would be upon us; and we should be engaged in the last struggle of our lives—without the slightest probability of being able to save them!

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE ASSAULT.

With the prospect of such fatal issue—so proximate as to seem already present—no wonder that our hearts were dismayed at sight of the waggon moving towards us. As the inhabitants of a leaguered city behold with fear the advance of the screened catapult or mighty 'ram,' so regarded we the approach of that familiar vehicle—now a very monster in our eyes.

We were not permitted to view the spectacle in perfect security. As the waggon moved forward, those who carried the muskets drew still nearer under cover of their horses, and once more played upon us their uncertain but dangerous shower. With the bullets hissing above and around us, we were forced to lie

low—only at intervals raising our heads to note the progress of the party proceeding to storm.

Slowly but surely the machine moved on—its wheels turning under the impulse of brawny arms—and impelled forward by pressure from behind. To fire upon it would have been of no avail: our bullets would have been thrown away. As easily might they have pierced through a stockade of tree-trunks.

Oh! for a howitzer! but one discharge of iron grape to have crashed through those planks of oak and ash—to have scattered in death that human machinery that was giving them motion!

Slowly and steadily it moved on—stopping only as some large pebble opposed itself to the wheel—then on again as the obstacle was surmounted—on till the intervening space was passed over, and the triumphant cheer of our savage foemen announced the attainment of their object.

Risking the straggling shots, we looked

over. The waggon had reached the base of the butte; its tongue was forced up among the trees—its body stood side by side with the granite prisms.

The storming party no longer required it as a shield: they would be sufficiently sheltered by the great boulders; and to these they now betook themselves—passing from one to the other, until they had completely surrounded the butte.

We observed this movement, but could not prevent it. We saw the Indians flitting from rock to rock, like red spectres, and with the rapidity of lightning flashes. In vain we attempted to take aim; before a barrel could be brought to bear upon them, they were gone out of sight. We ourselves, galled by the leaden hail, were forced to withdraw behind our ramparts.

A moment of suspense followed. We knew not how to act: we were puzzled by their movements, as well as by the silence in which they were making them.

Did they intend to climb up the butte, and openly attack us? What else should be their

design? What other object could they have in surrounding it?

Only about a dozen had approached under cover of the waggon. Was it likely that so few of them would assail us boldly and openly? No. Beyond a doubt, they had some other design!

Ha! what means that blue column slowly curling upward? It is smoke!

See! Another and another—a dozen of them! From all sides they shoot upward, encircling the mound!

Hark to those sounds! the 'swish' of burning grass—the crackle of kindling sticks! They are making fires around us!

The columns are at first filmy, but soon grow thicker and more dense. They spread out and join each other—they become attracted towards the rocky mass—they fall against its sides, and wreathing upward, wrap its summit in their ramifications. The platform is enveloped in the cloud!

We see the savages upon the plain—dimly, as if through a crape. Those with the guns in

their hands still continue to fire ; the others are dismounting.

The latter abandon their horses, and appear to be advancing on foot. Their forms through the magnifying mist, loom spectral and gigantic !

They are visible only for a moment. The smoke rolls its thick volume around the summit, and shrouds them from our sight.

We no longer see our enemy or the earth. The sky is obscured—even the rock on which we stand is no longer visible, nor one of us to the other !

Throughout all continues the firing from the plain ; the bullets hurtle around our heads, and the clamour of our foemen reaches our ears with fierce thrilling import.

We hear the crackling of faggots, and the spurting hissing noise of many fires ; but perceive no blaze—only the thick smoke rising in continuous waves, and every moment growing denser around us.

We can bear it no longer ; we are half-suffocated. Any form of death before this !

Is it too late to reach our horses? Doubtless, they are already snatched away? No matter: we cannot remain where we are. In five minutes, we must yield to the fearful asphyxia.

'No! never! let us die as we had determined, with arms in our hands!'

Voices husky and hoarse make answer in the affirmative.

We spring to our feet, and come together —so that we can touch each other. We grasp our guns, and get ready our knives and pistols. We make to the edge of the rock, and, sliding down, assure ourselves of the path. We grope our way downward, guided by the granite walls on each side. We go not with caution, but in the very recklessness of a desperate need. We are met by the masses of smoke still rolling upwards. Further down, we feel the hot caloric as we come nearer to the crackling fires.

We heed them not, but rush madly forward—till we have cleared both the cloud and the flames, and stand upon the level plain!

It is but escaping from the fires of hell to rush into the midst of its demons. On all sides, they surround us with poised spears and brandished clubs. Amidst their wild yells, we scarcely hear the cracking of our guns and pistols; and those who fall to our shots are soon lost to our sight, behind the bodies of others who crowd forward to encompass us.

For a short while, we keep together, and fight, back to back, facing our foes. But we are soon separated; and each struggles with a dozen assailants around him!

* * * *

The struggle was not protracted. So far as I was concerned, it ended, almost on the instant of my being separated from my comrades. A blow from behind, as of a club striking me upon the skull, deprived me of consciousness: leaving me only the one last thought—*that it was death!*

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A CAPTIVE ON A CRUCIFIX.

Am I dead? Surely it *was* death, or an oblivion that equalled it?

But no—I live! I am conscious that I live. Light is falling upon my eyes—thought is returning to my soul!

Am I upon earth? or is it another world in which I awake?

It is a bright world—with a sky of blue, and a sun of gold; but are they the sky and sun of the earth? Both may belong to a future world?

I can see no earth—neither fields, nor trees, nor rocks, nor water—nought but the

blue canopy and the golden orb. Where is the earth?

It should be under and around me, but I cannot see it. Neither around nor beneath can I look—only upward and forward—only upon the sun and the sky!

What hinders me from turning? Is it that I sleep, and dream? Is the incubus of a horrid nightmare upon me? Am I, like Prometheus, chained to a rock face upward?

No—not thus; I feel that I am standing—erect as if nailed against a wall!

If I am not dreaming, I am certainly in an upright attitude. I feel my limbs beneath me; while my arms appear to be stretched out to their full extent, and held as in the grasp of some invisible hand!

My head, too, is fixed: I can neither turn nor move it. A cord traverses across my cheeks. There is something between my teeth. A piece of wood it appears to be? It gags me, and half stifles my breathing!

Am I in human hands? or are they fiends who are thus clutching me? * * *

Anon my senses grow stronger, but wild fancies still mock me: I am yet uncertain if it be life!

What are those dark objects passing before my eyes? They are birds upon the wing—large birds of sable plumage. I know them. They are vultures. These are of the earth. Such could not exist in a region of spirits?

Ah! those sounds! they are weird enough to be deemed unearthly—wild enough to be mistaken for the voices of demons. From far beneath, they appear to rise—as if from the bowels of the earth, sinking and swelling in prolonged chorus.

I know and recognise the voices: they are human. I know the chaunted measure: it is the death-song of the Indian!

The sounds are suggestive. I am not dreaming—I am not dead. I am awake, and on the earth.

Memory comes to my aid. By little and little, I begin to realise my situation. I remember the siege—the smoke—the confused conflict—all that preceded it, but no-

thing after. I thought I had been killed. But no—I live—I am a captive.

My comrades—are *they* alive? Not likely. Better for them, if they be not. The consciousness of life need be no comfort to me. In that wild chaunt there is breathing a keen spirit of vengeance.

Oh! that I had not survived to hear it! Too surely do I know what will follow that dirge of death. It might as well be my own!

I am in pain. My position pains me—and the hot sun glaring upon my cheek. My arms and limbs smart under thongs that bind too tightly. One crosses my throat that almost chokes me, and the stick between my teeth renders breathing difficult. There is a pain upon the crown of my head, and my skull feels as if scalded. Oh Heavens! *have they scalped me*?

With the thought, I endeavour to raise my hand. In vain: I cannot budge either hand or arm. Not a finger can I move; and I am forced to remain in horrid doubt as to whether

the *hair* be still upon my head—with more than a probability that it is gone!

But how am I confined? and where?

I am fast bound to something: every joint in my body is fixed and immobile, as if turned to stone! I can feel thongs cutting sharply into my skin; and my back and shoulders press against some supporting substance, that seems hard as rock.

I cannot tell what it is. I cannot even see my own person—neither breast nor body—neither arms nor legs—not an inch of myself. The fastening over my face holds it upturned to the sky; and my head feels firmly set—as if the vertebral column of my neck had become ossified into a solid mass!

And where am I in this stringent attitude? I am conscious that I am a captive and bound—a captive to Indians—to Arapahoes. Memory helps me to this knowledge; and furthermore, that I should be, if I have not been carried elsewhere, in the valley of the Huerfano—by the Orphan Butte. Ha! why should I not be *upon* the butte—on its summit?

I remember going down to the plain; and there being struck senseless to the earth. For all that, I may have been brought up again. The savages may have borne me back to satisfy some whim? They often act in such strange fashion with their vanquished victims. I must be on some eminence: since I cannot see the earth before me?

In all likelihood, I am on the top of the mound. This will account for my not having a view of the ground. It will also explain the direction in which the voices are reaching me. Those who utter them are below upon the plain?

The death-song ceases: and sounds of other import are borne upward to my ears. I hear shouts that appear to be signals—words of command in the fierce guttural of the Arapaho. Other sounds seem nearer. I distinguish the voices of two men in conversation. They are Indian voices.

As I listen, they grow more distinct. The speakers are approaching me—the voices reach me, as if rising out of the ground beneath my feet!

They draw nigher and nigher. They are close to where I stand—so close that I can feel them breathing upon my body—but still I see them not. Their heads are below the line of my vision.

I feel a hand—knuckles pressing against my throat; the cold blade of a knife is laid along my cheek; its steel point glistens under my eyes. I shudder with a horrid thought.

I mistake the purpose. I hear the 'wheek' that announces the cutting of a tight-drawn cord. The thong slackens, and drops off from my cheeks. My head is free; but the piece of wood between my teeth—it remains still gagging me firmly. I cannot get rid of that.

I can now look below, and around me. I perceive the correctness of my conjecture. I am on the butte—upon its summit. I am close to the edge of the platform, and command a full view of the valley below.

A painted Arapaho is standing on each side of me. One is a common warrior, with nought to distinguish him from his fellows.

The other is a chief. Even without the insignia of his rank, the tall gaunt form and lupine visage are easily identified. They are those of Red-Hand—the truculent chieftain of the Arapahoes.

Now for the first time, do I perceive that I am naked. From the waist upward, there is not a rag upon me—arms, breast, and body all bare!

This does not surprise me. It is natural that the robbers should have stripped me—that they should at least have taken my coat, whose yellow buttons are bright gold in the eyes of an Indian. But I am now to learn that for another, and very different, purpose have they thus bereft me of my garments.

Now also do I perceive the *fashion* in which I am confined. I am erect upon my feet, with arms stretched out to their full fathom. My limbs are lashed to an upright post; and, with the same thong, are my arms tied to a transverse beam. *I am bound upon a cross!*

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE MYSTERIOUS CIRCLE.

In an exulting tone, the savage chief broke silence.

'*Bueno!*' cried he, as soon as he saw that my eyes were upon him—'*bueno, bueno!* The pale-face still lives! the heart of the Red-Hand is glad of it—ha, ha, ha! Give him to drink of the fire-water of Taos! Let him be strong! Fill him with life, that death may be all the more bitter to him!'

These orders were delivered to his follower, who, in obedience to them, removed the gag; and, holding to my lips a calabash filled with Taos whiskey, poured a quantity of the liquor down my throat.

The beverage produced the effect which

the savage chief appeared to desire. Scarcely had I swallowed the fiery spirit when my strength and senses were restored to their full vigour — but only to make me feel more keenly the situation in which I stood—to comprehend more acutely the appalling prospect that was before me.

This was the design in resuscitating me. No other purpose had the cruel savage. Had I entertained any doubt as to the motive, his preliminary speech would have enlightened me; but it was made still clearer by that which followed.

'Dog of a pale-face!' cried he, brandishing a long Spanish knife before my eyes; 'you shall see how the Red-Hand can revenge himself upon the enemies of his race. The Slayer of Panthers, and the White Eagle shall die an hundred deaths. They have mocked the forest maiden, who has followed them from afar. Her vengeance shall be satisfied; and the Red-Hand will have his joy—ha, ha, ha!'

Uttering a peal of demoniac laughter, the

Indian held the point of the knife close to my forehead—as if about to drive the blade into my eyes!

It was but a feint to produce terror—a spectacle which this monster was said to enjoy.

Wingrove was still alive: the wretch Su-wa-nee must be near?

'*Carajo!*' again yelled the savage. 'What promised you the Red-Hand? To cut the living flesh from your bones? But no—that would be merciful. The Arapahoes have contrived a sweeter vengeance—one that will appease the spirits of our slain warriors. We shall combine sport with the sacrifice of the pale-faced dogs—ha, ha, ha!'

After another fiendish cachinnation, far more horrible to hear than his words of menace, the monster continued:

'Dog! you refused to instruct the Arapaho in the skill of the fire-weapon; but you shall furnish them with at least one lesson before you die—ha, ha! You shall soon experience the pleasant death we have prepared for you! Ugh!'

'Haste!' he continued, addressing himself to his follower; 'prepare him for the sacrifice! Our warriors are impatient for the sport. The blood of our brothers is calling for vengeance. This in white, with a red spot in the centre—the rest of his body in black.'

These mysterious directions were accompanied by a corresponding gesture. With the point of his knife, the savage traced a circle upon my breast—just as if he had been *scribing* it on the bark of a tree. The scratch was light, though here and there it drew blood. At the words 'red spot in the centre,' as if to make the direction more emphatic, he punctured the spot with his knife till the blood flowed freely. Had he driven the blade to its hilt, I could not have flinched: I was fixed firmly as the post to which they had bound me.

I could not speak a word—either to question his intent, or reply to his menace. The gag was still between my teeth, and I was necessarily silent.

It mattered little about my remaining silent. Had my tongue been free, it would have been idle to use it. In the wolf's visage, there was not one trait of clemency: every feature bespoke the obduracy of unrelenting cruelty. I knew that he would only have mocked any appeal I might have made. It was just as well that I had no opportunity of making it.

After giving some further directions to his follower—and once more repeating his savage menace, in the same exulting tone—he passed behind me; and I lost sight of him. But I could tell by the noise that reached me at intervals, that he had gone down from the rock, and was returning to his warriors upon the plain.

It was the first time since my face-fastenings had been cut loose, that I had a thought of looking in that direction. During all the while that the Red-Hand stood by me, I had been in constant dread of instant death—or of some equally fearful issue. The gleaming blade had never been out of my eyes for two

seconds at a time; for in the gesticulations that accompanied his speeches, the steel had played an important part, and I knew not the moment, it might please the ferocious savage to put an end to my life.

Now that he was gone, and I found a respite from his torturing menace, my eyes turned mechanically to the plain.

I there beheld a spectacle, that under other circumstances might have filled me with horror. Not so then. The agony of my thoughts was already too keen to be further quickened. Even the gory skull of one of my comrades, who lay scalped upon the sward, scarcely added an emotion. It was a sight I had anticipated. They could not all be alive.

CHAPTER XXX.

A SAVAGE ARTIST.

The ensanguined skull was the first object that caught my eye. The dead man was easily identified. The body—short, plump, and rotund—could be no other than that of the unfortunate Irishman. His jacket had been stripped off; but some tattered remnants of sky-blue, still clinging to his legs, aided me in identifying him.

Poor fellow! The lure of Californian metal had proved an ill star for him. His golden dream was at an end.

He was lying along the sward, upon his side, half doubled up. I could not see his face. His hands were over it, with palms

spread out—as if shading his eyes from the sun! It was a position of ordinary repose; and one might have fancied him asleep. But the gory crown, and red mottling upon the shirt—seemingly still wet—forbade the supposition. He slept; but it was the sleep of death!

My eyes wandered in search of the others.

There were fires burning. They were out upon the plain, some three hundred yards from the base of the butte. They had been lately kindled: for their smoke was rising in thick columns, part of it falling again to the earth.

Around the fires, and through the smoke, flitted the forms of the Indians. They appeared to be cooking and feasting. Some of them staggering over the ground, kept up an incessant babble—at intervals varying their talk with savage whoops. Others danced around, accompanying their leaps with the monotonous 'hi-hi-hi-ya.' All appeared to have partaken freely of the fire-water of Taos.

A few more seriously disposed were grouped around four or five prostrate forms—evidently the bodies of their slain.

The two we had shot from their horses must have been amongst these: since they were no longer to be seen where they had fallen.

Those around the bodies stood hand in hand chanting the dismal death-song.

Not far from the fires, a group fixed my attention. It consisted of three figures—all in attitudes as different as it was possible to place them in. He who lay along the ground, upon his back, was the young hunter Wingrove. He still wore his fringed buckskin shirt and leggings; and by these I recognised him. He was at too great a distance for his features to be distinguished. He appeared to be bound hand and foot—with his ankles lashed together, and his wrists tied behind his back. He was thus lying upon his arms, in an irksome position; but the attitude showed that he was alive. I knew it already.

Some half-dozen paces from him was a second form, difficult to be recognised as that of a human being—though it was one. It was the body of Jephthah Bigelow. Its very oddness of shape enabled me to identify it—odder

from the attitude in which I now beheld it. It was lying flat along the grass, face downward, the long ape-like legs and arms stretched out to their full extent—both as to length and width—and radiating from the thin trunk like spokes from the nave of a wheel!

Viewing it from my elevated position, this attitude appeared all the more ludicrous; though it was easy to perceive that it was not voluntary. The numerous pegs standing up from the sward, and the cords attached to them, and leading to the arms and limbs, showed that the *spread-eagle* position was a constrained one.

That it was Sure-shot, I had no doubt. The spare locks of clay-coloured hair were playing about in the breeze; and some remnants of bottle-green still clung around his limbs. But without these, the spider-like frame was too characteristic to be mistaken.

I was glad to see those yellowish tufts. They told that the wearer still lived—as was also made manifest by the fact of his being

bound. A dead body would not have merited such particular treatment.

It was the third figure of this group that most strongly claimed my attention.

I saw that it was not that of a warrior; though quite as tall as many upon the plain. But the contour of the form was different—as also the fashion of the garments that draped it. It was the figure of a woman!

Had I not been guided in my conjectures—by a certain foreknowledge—by the allusions that had occurred in the speeches of Red-Hand—I should never have dreamt of identifying that form. Forewarned by these, the apparition was not unexpected. The woman was Su-wa-nee!

She was standing erect by the prostrate form of the young hunter—her head slightly bent, and her face turned towards him. An occasional motion of her arm showed that she was speaking to him. The gesture seemed to indicate a threat! Was it possible that in that dread hour she was reviling him?

I was at too great a distance, either to hear

her words, or note the expression upon her face. Only by the dumb show of her gesticulations, could I tell that a scene was passing between them.

A glance around the plain enabled me to note some other changes that had recently taken place. The horses of the Indians were now picketed upon the grass, and browsing peacefully—as if the clangour of strife had never sounded in their ears. I could see my own Arab a little apart, with Wingrove's horse and the mules—all in the charge of a horse-guard, who stood sentry near them.

The waggon was still by the base of the mound. The cedars along its sides were yet unburnt! I thought that the flames had consumed them, but no. The object of their fires had been to blind us with their smoke—thus to drive us from our position, and facilitate our capture.

I was not permitted to make these observations without interruption. The savage who had stood by me had a duty to perform; and during all this time he was busied in its per-

formance. A singular and inexplicable operation it at first appeared to me.

His initiatory act was to blacken my body from the waist upward, including my face, throat, and arms. The substance used appeared to be a paste of charcoal, which he rubbed rudely over my skin. A circle upon my breast—that traced out by the blade of the chief—was left clear; but as soon as the black ground had been laid on, a new substance was exhibited, of snow-white colour, resembling chalk or gypsum. With this—after the blood had been carefully dried off—the circular space was thickly coated over, until a white disc, about as large as a dining-plate shewed conspicuously on my breast!

A red spot in the centre of this was necessary to complete the *escutcheon;* but the painter appeared at a loss for the colour, and paused to reflect.

Only a moment did he remain at fault. He was an ingenious artist; and his ingenuity soon furnished him with an idea.

Drawing his knife, and sticking the point of

it some half inch deep into the fleshy part of my thigh, he obtained the required "carmine"; and, after dipping his finger in the blood, and giving it a dab in the centre of the white circle, he stood for a short time contemplating his work.

A grim smile announced that he was satisfied with it; and, uttering a final grunt, the swarthy Apelles leaped down from the platform, and disappeared from my sight.

A horrid suspicion had already taken possession of my soul; but I was not left long to speculate upon the purpose for which I had been thus bedaubed: the suspicion gave place to certainty.

Upon the plain directly in front of me, and at less than a hundred yards' distance from the butte, the warriors were collecting in groups. The Red-Hand with his under-chiefs had already arrived there; and the other Indians were forsaking the fires, and hurrying up to the spot.

They had left their lances apart, standing upright on the plain, with their shields, bows,

and quivers leaning against them, or suspended from their shafts. The only weapons taken along with them to the common rendezvous were the muskets. With these they were now occupying themselves—apparently preparing them for use.

I saw them mark out a line upon the grass, by stretching a lazo between two upright pegs. I saw them wiping, loading, and priming their pieces—in short, going through all the preliminary manœuvres, observed by marksmen preparing for a trial of skill.

Then burst on me in all its broad reality the dread horror for which I was reserved—then did I comprehend the design of that white circle with its centre of red: the savages were about to hold a shooting-match—*my own bosom was to be their target!*

CHAPTER XXXI.

A PITILESS PASTIME.

Yes—to hold a shooting-match was undoubtedly the design of my captors; and equally clear was it that my breast was to be their mark. This explained my position upon the summit of the mound, as well as my attitude upon the cross. I was bound to the latter, in order that my person might be held erect, spread, and conspicuous.

I could not comfort myself with any doubt as to their intention. Every movement I saw confirmed it; and the question was finally set at rest by Red-Hand possessing himself of one of the loaded muskets, and making ready to fire.

Stepping a pace or two in front of the line of his warriors, he raised the piece to his shoulder, and pointed it towards me.

It is vain to attempt describing the horror I endured at that moment. Utterly unable to move, I gazed upon the glistening barrel, with its dark tube, that threatened to send forth the leaden messenger of death.

I have stood before the pistol of the duellist. It is not a pleasant position to be in, under any conditions of quarrel. Still is it perfect happiness compared with that I then held. In the former case, there are certain circumstances that favour the chances of safety. You know that you are *en profile* to your antagonist —thus lessening the danger of being hit. Judging by yourself, you feel assured that the aim taken will be quick and unsteady, and the shot a random one. You are conscious of possessing the capability of motion—that whether you may feel inclined to give way to it or not, you still have a certain discretion of avoiding the deadly missile—that by superior skill or quickness, you may anticipate your

antagonist and hinder his bullet from being sent.

There are other circumstances of a moral nature to sustain you in a trial of this kind—pride, angry passion, the fear of social contempt; and stronger than all— perhaps most frequent of all—the jealousy of rival love.

From none of all these could I derive support, as I stood before the raised musket of the Arapaho. There was no advantage—either moral or physical—in my favour. I was broad front to the danger, without the slightest capacity of 'dodging' it; whilst there was nothing to excite the nerves of the marksman, or render his aim unsteady. On the contrary, he was sighting me as coolly, as if about to fire at a piece of painted plank.

It may have been but a minute that the savage occupied himself in adjusting his aim; but to me it appeared ten. In such a situation, I may have believed the seconds to be minutes: they seemed so. In reality, the time must have been considerable. The drops of sweat that had started from my brow were

chasing each other over my cheeks and trickling down upon my breast. So prolonged was the suspense, I began to fancy that the Arapaho was designedly dallying with his aim for the purpose of sporting with my fears!

He may have had such motive for procrastination. I could have believed it. Distant though he was, I could mark his fiendish smile, as he repeatedly dropped the piece from his shoulder, and then returned it to the level.

That he meant more than mere menace, however, was proved in the end. Having satisfied himself with several idle feints, I saw him make demonstration, as if setting himself more determinedly to the work.

This time he was certainly in earnest. His cheek lay steadily along the stock—his arms appeared more rigid—his finger was pressing on the trigger—the moment had come!

The flash from the pan—the red stream poured forth from the muzzle—the hist of the bullet, were all simultaneous.

The report came afterwards; but, before it had reached my ears, I knew that I was

untouched. The lead had already whizzed past, at a distance—as I could judge by the sound—of several feet from my body.

I heard a scratching behind me; and the instant after, a swarthy face was thrust before my eyes. It was that of the artist, who had painted me for the part I was playing. I had been under the impression that he had gone down to the plain, but I now perceived my error. He had remained near me, concealing his body behind the rock. I saw that he was now enacting a different *rôle*—that of marker for the marksmen.

Running his eye over my body, and perceiving that I was nowhere hit, he telegraphed the intelligence to his comrades upon the plain; and then glided back to his covert.

I was relieved from the terrible anxiety; but only for a short moment—a mere interval of about a dozen seconds' duration. The Red-Hand, after firing, had resigned his place; but this was instantly occupied by one of his sub-chiefs—who, armed with another musket, in turn stepped up to the line.

Again saw I the gleaming barrel brought to the level, with its dark tube pointed upon my body.

This marksman was more expeditious; but for all that, it was to me a time of racking torture. Again did the drops bead out upon my brow, and chase one another down my cheeks. Again had I to undergo all the agony of death itself—and, as before, without dying, or even losing a drop of my blood!

As before, I beheld the puff of smoke, the flash, the blaze of fire projected from the muzzle; but ere the crack reached me, I heard the 'thud' of the bullet, as it flattened against the granite on which I stood.

This time the marker did not mount up to the platform. He had seen the splinters shivered from the rock; and without further inquiry, for the second time, telegraphed a miss.

A third candidate appeared upon the stand; and my fears returned—as acute as ever.

This fellow caused me to suffer nearly a dozen deaths. Either was his gun without a

flint, or his powder damp: since after snapping nearly a dozen times, the piece still refused to go off.

Had it been designed to give me a new horror, the thing could not have been better planned: for each time that the savage essayed to fire, I had to undergo the agony of a fresh apprehension.

The scene ended by another gun being placed in his hands, that *did* go off; but with no advantage to the clumsy marksman: for his bullet, like that of the Red-Hand, whistled past, far wide of the mark.

A fourth now took the ground.

This was a tall, swarthy warrior—one of the tallest of the tribe; and without the insignia of a chief. The cool and deliberate manner in which he went about his work, caused me to anticipate in him a better shot; and my apprehensions were heightened to a degree of painful intensity.

I felt my whole frame shiver as his gun blazed forth; and for a time I believed myself hit. The cheer of his companions upon the

plain announced their belief in the success of the shot; but he upon the summit soon undeceived them—just as I became myself reassured.

The bullet had struck the wood-work of my crucifix—one of the cross-pieces to which my arms were attached. It was the shock of the timber that had deceived me into the belief that I had been struck.

A fifth marksman followed; and then another and another—until more than a dozen had tried their hands.

The guns were now all emptied; but this caused only a temporary cessation in the cruel sport. They were soon reloaded; and new candidates stepped forward to make trial of their skill.

I had by this time discovered that they were not practising for mere sport. It was a *game*, and bets were laid upon it. Apart upon the plain, the stakes were placed—consisting of saddles, robes, weapons, and the plunder of the emigrant waggon. Horses also were picketed near—surplus animals—that were

betted against one another: whether in many separate wagers, or all forming a grand 'pool,' I could not determine.

My own scalp—I was uncertain whether I still wore it—was no doubt the chief object of the contest. It was the 'cup,' to be given to him who should place his bullet in that white circle upon my breast, and nearest the red spot in the centre!

The guns being once more reloaded, the firing recommenced.

I saw that only one shot was allowed to each; and this only to those who had entered a stake. The condition gave me an opportunity of experiencing my apprehensions in different degrees: since, according to the apparent adroitness or clumsiness of the marksman, my fears of being hit were greater or less.

Strange to say, before a dozen shots had been fired, *I no longer wished them to miss!* The dread ordeal, so oft repeated, was too terrible to be borne. I was sustained by no hope of ultimate escape. I knew that the

fiends would continue firing, till some one of them should finish me by a fatal shot; and I cared not how soon it should be sent.

Nay—I even desired that it should come quickly. Death was preferable to the agony I was enduring.

CHAPTER XXXII.

AN HUNDRED DEATHS.

For a full hour was the pitiless pastime continued—during which at least fifty shots had been fired at my person. The truculent chieftain had threatened me with an hundred deaths. He was fulfilling his threat to the letter; for, notwithstanding the unskilful practice, I felt, on the eve of each discharge, a certain creeping of the flesh, and curdling of the blood, as if that moment was to be my last. If I had not yet died an hundred times, for at least so many had I felt all the sensations that should precede actual death. In truth over an hundred times: for although

but fifty shots had been fired, twice as often had the old guns snapped or flashed in the pan; and each of these was preceded by its especial pang.

I had not escaped altogether unscathed: I had been hit in two or three places—in my arms and limbs. Blood was running down my legs, and creeping over my feet. I could feel it warm and wet, as it trickled between my toes. In a little hollow of the rock, directly in front of me, a crimson pool was collecting.

The wounds could not be severe: since I scarcely felt them. Perhaps only the crease of a bullet? A scratch would be sufficient to cause the effusion of the blood—copious though it appeared to be; and I felt certain that no bone had yet been broken—that no vital part of my body had been touched.

After about an hour had been spent by the savages in their fiendish sport, the firing became suddenly suspended. I could not tell why; and sought for an explanation by watching the movements of the marksmen.

Had they exhausted their ammunition? This was the idea that came uppermost.

The chiefs had turned face to face, and were again engaged in some earnest deliberation.

The subject of their talk was made known by their gesticulations. They were pointing towards Sure-shot, who still lay, as I have described, flat upon his face.

Wingrove was no longer there; nor yet Suwa-nee! Where could they have gone?

I had seen both but the moment before! Had she unbound, and rescued him? Was it about them that the savages were in consultation?

No—the result proved not. It was the deserter who was the object of their attention—as was soon made manifest by their movements.

Half a dozen warriors were seen separating from the group, and running up to the spot where Sure-shot lay.

Stooping around him, they undid his fastenings; and then, having raised him to his feet, commenced dragging him towards the crowd of marksmen.

The terrified man made no resistance. It would have been idle. There was a brawny savage on each side, grasping him by the wrist; and three or four behind pushing him forward at a run.

His long hair streaming loosely, strengthened the expression of despair that was depicted upon his countenance. No doubt he deemed it his last hour. Whither could they be dragging him? Whither but to death?

This was my own belief—at first; but in a few minutes I had reason to change it.

For a short while, Sure-shot was encircled by the dusky forms, and I saw him not—or only the crown of his head—conspicuous by its yellow hue among the darker *chevelures* of the Indians.

What were they doing to him? I could not guess; but they appeared to be offering him no further violence.

After a time, the group scattered from around him, and the ex-rifleman was again uncovered to my view.

With some surprise, I perceived that the

expression of his countenance had undergone a total change. It was no longer that of terror —much less of despair. On the contrary, there was a certain air of confidence visible both in his look and manner—as if something had been said, or done to him, that had given him satisfaction!

I was further surprised at perceiving that he had a gun in his hands—his own rifle—and that he was in the act of loading the piece!

My surprise changed to indignation as I saw him step forward to the line, and stand facing me—evidently with the intention to fire!

'Cowardly traitor! he has accepted life upon some base condition. Jeph Bigelow! Sure-shot! whom I thought true as steel! I would not have believed it.'

Such was the reflection, to which my gag prevented me from giving utterance.

In reality, I felt astonished at the behaviour of the old ranger. I believed him a better man; but the dread of death is a powerful

test to apply to the human soul; and hard must be the conditions of life when, under such circumstances, they are refused. Sure-shot had succumbed to the temptation.

Such was my belief, as I saw him raise his piece, and stand confronting me—in an attitude that too plainly bespoke his intention.

Another surprise awaited me—another stimulus to my indignation. Instead of looking ashamed of his work, and cowering under my glance, he appeared eager and determined to execute the dastardly design. There was even an expression of fierceness, ill becoming his countenance habitually meek. Under other circumstances, it would have been ludicrous enough. 'Bravado,' thought I, 'assumed, no doubt, to give satisfaction to his new allies?'

I had not recovered from the confusion of my surprise, when his voice fell upon my ear —uttered in a tone of anger, and accompanied with corresponding gestures. But the words that reached me explained all. On hearing them, I no longer suspected the loyalty of my

old comrade. The angry expression *was* assumed; but the counterfeit had a design, far different from that which I had attributed to it. It was Sure-shot himself—still tricky as true.

'Capting!' cried he, speaking quickly, and raising his gun with a gesture of menace, 'pay 'tention to whet I'm beout to say. Look savagerous at me, an' make these yeer verming b'lieve you an' me's que'lling. Fo'most tell me, ef they've krippled ye beout the legs? I know ye can't speak; but shet yeer eyes, an' thet says "No."'

I was for the moment puzzled, by the matter as well as manner of his speech, which in no way corresponded. In an instant, however, I perceived that he had some design; and I hastened to obey his hurried instructions.

As to the first, I needed to make no alteration in my demeanour. Under the belief that he was disloyal, I had been regarding him with a glance sufficiently scowling. I preserved the expression—at the same time

closing my eyes, as a negative answer to his query. Although I believed myself to be hit somewhere about the legs, I felt confident that I was not 'crippled.'

'So fur good!' continued he, still speaking loudly and angrily. 'Neow! slew yeer right elbow down a leetle, an' gi' me a better chance at thet eer strip o' hide. I kinder guess as heow I kin cut the thing. It 'peers to be all o' one piece, an' 'll peel off yeer body like a rope o' rushes. Ef I cut it, theer'll be a chance for ye. Theer's only one o' the verming ahint the mound. Yeer hoss air theer; make for the anymal—mount 'im, an' put off like a streak of greased lightnin'! Neow!'

As he finished speaking, he stepped nearer to the line, and placed himself in an attitude to fire.

I now fully comprehended his design. I saw, as he said, that the cord which bound me to the crucifix was all of one piece—a thin thong of raw hide—lapped not very tightly around my arms, legs, and body. If cut through at any point, it could easily be

detached; and, true enough, my horse must be behind the butte, for I could not see him in front. By a quick rush I might succeed in reaching him, before the Indians could intercept me? If so, then indeed might there be a chance of escaping.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A SHARP SHOT.

SLENDER as appeared the prospect of my being freed from my fastenings, by the method proposed, I was not without some faith in Sure-shot being able to cut the thong. His skill in the use of the rifle was notorious even among good marksmen—and his aim believed to be unerring. I had known him to bring down with his bullet a bird upon the wing; and had heard him declare that it was not by the *eye* but by the *mind* that he did it. In other words: he meant, that his skill was not mechanical; but that he was guided in the act by some mental operation—which he himself but imperfectly understood.

I could believe this the more readily—

since Sure-shot was not the only marksman I had known possessed of this peculiar power. A something inexplicable, which may be classed with the mysterious phenomena of clairvoyance and 'horse-whispering.'

With such belief in his skill, therefore, I was not without some hope that he might succeed in his design; and, to give him the chance he desired, I made a violent effort, and wrenched my arm downward.

It was to all appearance a demonstration of my wrath, at what the pseudo-renegade had been saying to me; and it seemed to be thus interpreted by most of the savages who stood around him.

The words of Sure-shot, spoken in English, were of course unintelligible to them; but, notwithstanding the inappropriate gestures which he had made use of, the suspicions of one were aroused. This was Red-Hand himself.

'What says he of the yellow scalp-lock to the captive?' inquired the chief in Spanish. 'Let him take heed, or he too shall become a shooting-mark for the Arapaho warriors!'

Sure-shot's reply was characteristic. It was also in broken Spanish, which the ranger had picked up during our campaign on the Rio Grande. Translated, it ran thus:

'I'm only telling him how I'm about to get square with him. *Carrambo*! great chief! when I was a soldier in the army, yon fellow was my *capitano*, and gave me a flogging. Believe me, chief! I'm right glad of this opportunity to have revenge on him. That's what I have been saying to him.'

'Ugh!' grunted the savage, apparently satisfied with the explanation.

'Neow, capting!' angrily shouted the rifleman, once more raising his piece to the level, 'look e' out! Don't be skeer't abeout my hittin' o' ye! The whang lies well ageen the bit o' timber. The ball 's a big 'un. I recking I kin bark it anyheow. Heer's to try!'

A tall yellow-haired man standing with a rifle to his shoulder—his sallow cheek resting against the stock—the barrel apparently aligned upon my body—the quick detonation

of a percussion-cap—a stream of red fire and smoke from the muzzle—a shock, followed by the quivering of the timbers to which I was tied, were perceptions and sensations of almost simultaneous occurrence.

Twisting my head, and turning my eyes almost out of their sockets, I was able to note the effect of the shot. The thong had been hit, just at the point where it doubled over the edge of the wood. It was cut more than half through!

By raising my elbow to its original position, and using it as a lever, I could tear apart the crushed fibres. I saw this; but in the anticipation of a visit from the marker, I prudently preserved my attitude of immobility.

In a moment after, the grinning savage came gliding in front of me; and, perceiving the track of the bullet, pointed it out to those upon the plain.

I was in a feverish state of suspense lest he might suspect design; but was relieved on seeing him step aside—while the shuffling grating noise from behind admonished me, that

he was once more letting himself down over the edge of the platform.

The crowd had already closed around Sure-shot, who appeared to be expostulating with the chief—as if offering some explanation of his failure.

I did not wait to witness the *dénouement*. Raising my elbow, and giving my arm a quick jerk, I heard the thong snapping asunder; and saw the broken ends spring out from their folds.

Another wrench set my right arm free; and then, clutching the loosened coils, I unwound them with as much rapidity, as if I had been freeing myself from the embrace of a serpent!

Not one of the Indians saw what I was about, till after I had undone my fastenings. Their eyes had been turned upon Sure-shot—with whom they appeared to be engaged in some angry altercation. It was only after I had sprung to one side, and stood clear of the crucifix, that I heard their ejaculations of astonishment, followed by a wild continuous yelling.

I stayed not to note what they were doing.

I merely glanced towards them, as I turned away; and perceived that they were still fixed to their places, as if petrified by surprise!

The moments were precious; and, bounding across the platform, I leaped down upon the opposite side.

There was a little shelf about six feet below the summit. I found it occupied by the indigenous artist. He was seated upon the edge, with his legs hanging over. His back was towards me; and he was only apprised of what had transpired, by seeing me as I sprang to his side. He had already heard the yells from the other side; and was about to get to his feet, at the moment I dropped down behind him.

He was too late for the accomplishment of his purpose. I saw that he was unarmed; but was apprehensive that by flinging himself upon me, he might hold or delay me.

I hesitated not as to what I should do. Rushing forward, I planted my foot against his shoulder, and giving his body a violent impulsion, projected it clear over the edge.

I saw it striking upon the angular prisms, and bounding from block to block—till it sunk out of sight amidst the tortuous branches of the cedars.

I ran down the sloping path—taking many yards at a step.

Not far off, was my horse—with that of Wingrove, and the mules. They formed a little group—but no longer under charge of a guard: for the latter had just left them, and was running forward to intercept me.

I saw that he had a weapon in his hands. It was a gun. He was pointing it upon me as he ran—endeavouring to take aim before firing.

I heeded not the threatening attitude, but rushed straight towards him. I could not go round him: since he was between me and the horses.

We both ran, as if to meet one another.

When less than five paces separated us, the Indian stopped, sighted me, and pulled trigger. His gun snapped!

Before he could lower the piece, I had

clutched the barrel: and, with a desperate effort, wrenched the weapon from his grasp.

I made a feint to strike him over the head. He threw up his arms to ward off the blow. Instead of using the gun as a club, I thrust him with the butt right under the ribs; and stretched him gasping upon the grass. He fell, as if shot through the head!

Still holding on to the gun—which, by a strange accident, proved to be my own rifle—I ran up to my horse. The creature welcomed me with a neigh of joy!

It was but the work of a moment to draw the picket-pin, gather up the laryette, and spring to his back. Once there, I felt that I was free!

The Indians came screaming around the butte—most of them afoot, and with no other weapons than the empty muskets.

A few, more prudent than their fellows, had made towards their arms and horses; but, both being at a distance, they had not yet reached them; and the advantage was mine.

I was no longer hurried in my actions—

not even afraid. I had no apprehension of being retaken. On the back of my brave steed, I felt like an ocean cast-away, who has climbed up the sides of a strong ship, and once more stands safely upon deck!

I felt confident that from my pursuers, I could gallop away at will; and, after taking time to adjust my laryette as a halter, I gave the head to my horse, and rode off.

My Arab needed no urging. Up the valley went he, like a bird upon the wing. I could laugh to scorn the savage pack that came hallooing behind me.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE CHASE AND THE SYNCOPE.

I MADE direct for the cañon whence issued the stream. Its gap grew wider as I approached it—though still appearing only a dark cleft between the rocks, like the entrance to some subterranean passage.

I looked forward to it with satisfaction. Its shadowy chasm promised shelter and concealment.

When near the entrance of the gorge, I passed the ground where the waggon had been captured. Part of its load—barrels and heavy boxes—were lying upon the sward. They were all broken, and rifled of their contents. The plunder had been carried to the butte.

The dead bodies were still there—only those of the white men. I even halted to examine them.

They were all stripped of their clothing—all scalped, and otherwise mutilated. The faces of all were blood-bedaubed. Under the red mask I could not have recognised them—even had they been the faces of old friends!

There were six of them. Divested of their garments, I could form no conjecture as to who or what they had been—whether teamsters or emigrants, gold-seekers or soldiers. The Mormon could not have been among them: the bodies were all too stout for his; while, on the other hand, there was none of them that could have been mistaken for that of the squatter, Holt.

I turned away from the sickening sight, andcon tinued my gallop.

My pursuers were a full mile behind me. The sun had already sunk over the crest of the cliffs, and I could just see the mounted savages through the darkling gloom—still following as fast as their horses could gallop.

In five minutes after, I had entered the gorge.

The twilight continued no longer: in the cañon it was night.

I followed the stream upwards, keeping along near its bank.

Thick darkness was over and around me; but the gleam of the water and its rippling sound served to guide me on the path. I could not see any track—either of horses or waggons—but I knew they had passed over the ground. There was a narrow strip of bottom-land thickly timbered; and an opening through the trees indicated the road that the waggons must have taken.

I trusted the trail to my horse. In addition to his keen instinct, he had been trained to tracking; and with his muzzle projected forward and downward—so that his lips almost touched the earth—he lifted the scent like a hound.

We could only make progress at a quick walk; but I consoled myself with the thought that my pursuers could go no faster.

Seeing how easily I had ridden away from them, they might determine to abandon the pursuit—returning to revenge themselves upon my fellow-captives.

About these, my mind was filled with bitter reflections; and strange enough, my strongest sympathies were with Sure-shot!

I could not help thinking that he had sacrificed himself to save me. There could be no doubt of his having done so. He had been offered life, on some traitorous conditions, and could have lived.

The Indian whom I had hurled over the rocks, if still alive, would explain my escape. The cunning savages would easily understand it. My brave comrade would take my place upon the crucifix?

For Wingrove I had less fear. Surely love—even slighted love—would save him from the sacrifice?

Yet, after what had occurred, I had but little reason to hope even for him.

I could think of but one chance of rescuing them: to overtake the train, and prevail upon the escort to return.

I wondered at the dragoons having abandoned the waggon, and left the poor fellows who were with it to their fate!

I could only explain such conduct, by supposing that these had been far behind, and that their disaster was still unknown to the people of the caravan. The six men who had fallen might have been the only ones along with the waggon; and their firing, as they defended themselves, might not have been heard? The roar of the water in the cañon might have drowned the reports of their guns; and, as I now listened to its deafening sound, I could believe in this hypothesis.

Indulging in such conjectures, I had groped my way some two or three miles up the gorge, when I became sensible of a singular faintness stealing over me. A chill crept through my frame—not like that produced by cold from without; but as if the blood was freezing in my veins! The feeling was accompanied by a sense of torpor and lassitude—like that experienced by one falling to sleep in a snow-storm.

I made an effort to rouse myself—thinking

it was sleep that was oppressing me. It might well have been—since it was more than thirty hours since I had slept, and then only for a short while.

It occurred to me that, by dismounting and walking for a distance, I might recover warmth and wakefulness. With this design, I alighted from my horse.

Once upon the ground, I discovered that I could not walk—that I could not even keep my feet! My limbs tottered under me, as if I had been for months a bedril. Only by holding on to my horse could I stand erect!

What could it mean?

My Arab turned his face towards me, as if making the same inquiry!

I endeavoured to remount him, but could not. I was unable even to clamber upon his back; and after an unsuccessful effort, desisted—still supporting myself against his body. Had he moved away, at the moment, I should have fallen.

And I must have fallen—after my senses left me. In the last gleam of consciousness,

I remembered standing by the side of my horse. But I must have fallen: for when thought returned, I found myself upon my back, stretched at full length along the grass!

CHAPTER XXXV.

PASSED BY THE PURSUIT.

I MUST have fallen upon my back, or else turned upon it after falling.

On opening my eyes, the sky was the first object that my glance encountered. I saw only a strip of it, of dark-blue colour, bordered on each side by black. I knew it was the sky by its twinkling stars: and that the black borderings were the cliffs of the cañon. By this I remembered where I was, and the stars and darkness admonished me it was still night.

There was hot air upon my face—as if some one was behind breathing down upon me.

I turned my head, and looked upward. A

pair of brilliant eyes were glancing into mine. So confused were my senses, that it was some time before I made them out to be the eyes of my Arab. He was standing over me, with his muzzle close to my forehead. It was his breath I had felt upon my face.

I could not tell how long I had been entranced. I had no clue to the time of night, and I was not in a position to consult the stars. I must have lain several hours, partly in syncope, and partly asleep.

It was fortunate I had a buffalo-robe around my body. I had found it lying upon the plain among the dead men; and had snatched it up, and tied it around my shoulders as I rode on. But for it, I might have perished in my slumber: since the night was chill, and I had neither covering on my back, nor blood in my veins, to resist the cold. It was the absence of the latter that had brought me to the ground. I had left most of my blood upon the butte.

Sleep or time had revived me. I was able to get to my feet; and I arose.

I was still weak, and staggered like a lamb;

but my senses were sufficiently clear; and I now recollected everything that had transpired.

I was also conscious of the danger of remaining in that place; and it was this thought that induced me to get up—with the intention of going forward.

I was strong enough to mount, and just strong enough to keep the seat upon my horse; but I was aware of the necessity of putting a wider distance between myself and the Red-Hand before daylight should arrive; and I continued onward up the ravine.

The trace was easily followed—more easily than when I first entered the cañon. There was more light; and this must have been caused by a moon. I could see none—the cliffs hindered me—but the strip of sky visible above the rocks showed the sheen of moonlight.

I rode but slowly. Feeble though I was, I could have ridden faster, but I was proceeding with caution. Strange as it may seem, I was now paying more regard to the front than the

rear. I had a suspicion that my pursuers might be *ahead* of me.

I could hardly believe in their having abandoned the pursuit, after so slight an effort. Too many of them had fallen by my hand. They would scarce let me escape so easily, and with my scalp untaken: I had ascertained that the trophy was still upon my head.

It was quite possible they had passed me. While endeavouring to mount my horse, I had drawn him from the path; and the place where I had found myself lying was behind some bushes, where I should have been screened from the eyes of any one riding along the track. In daylight I might have been seen; but not then. At that hour the darkness would have concealed me.

And it *had* concealed me, as I soon after discovered. My suspicion that the pursuers had passed me proved the means of saving me. But for the caution it had prompted me to observe, I should have ridden head to head against their horses!

I had proceeded about a mile further, and

was still advancing when my steed raised his head horizontally, and gave utterance to a low snort. At the same instant, he stopped without any tightening of the rein!

Above the sough of the stream, I heard noises. The intonation of the red man's voice was easily recognised. There were Indians in front of me!

Were they coming or going?

The voices grew louder as I listened—the speakers were nearing me.

My first thought was to glide behind the trees; but a glance showed me that these were not tall enough. They were mere bushes. They might have concealed the body of a man; but a horse standing up could not have been hidden behind them.

For a moment, I was undecided as to how I should act—till I bethought me of turning, and riding back to where I had lain.

I was in the act of facing about, when through the sombre light I observed a break in the cliff. It appeared to be a gap—the entrance of a lateral ravine. It offered a

chance of concealment: since it was even darker than within the cañon itself.

I hesitated not about accepting the shelter it promised; and, heading my horse into it, I rode rapidly but silently forward.

When fairly concealed under its shadowy gloom, I again halted and listened.

I heard the hoof-strokes of horses and the voices of men. I recognised the deep guttural of the Arapahoes. A troop was riding past, going back towards the valley. They were those who had pursued me.

Were these *all* of my pursuers? There appeared to be only a small party — ten or a dozen horsemen. Others might have gone up the river, who had not yet returned?

It was this doubt that caused me to hesitate; otherwise I should have ridden back into the cañon, and kept on up the stream. But by doing so, I might place myself between two parties of my pursuers, with no chance of retreating in either direction.

Moreover, pickets might have been stationed

along the path? To fall upon one of these would be fatal.

Why not follow the lateral ravine? I might ride up that for a distance, and then leaving it, cross over to the caravan trace—above any point to which the pursuit might have been carried?

This plan appeared feasible; and without delay, I adopted it.

I rode on up the gorge, which very much resembled that I had left—only that there was no water in it. It had not been always so: for my path here and there ran over a channel of rocks, which indicated the bed of a stream, now dry.

I followed the ravine for a mile or more; and then looked for a path that would take me across to the caravan trail. I looked in vain. Stupendous cliffs rose on each side. I could not scale them.

I had no choice but to keep on up the ravine; but that would be going at right angles to my proper course!

There was no alternative but halt and

wait for daylight. Indeed, I was too faint to ride further. Slight exertion fatigued me; and, no longer in dread of immediate danger, I deemed it more prudent to stop, and, if possible, gain strength by rest.

I dismounted, gave my horse to the grass; and, having wrapped myself in the warm robe, soon entered upon the enjoyment of sleep—sweeter and more natural than the involuntary slumber in which I had been lately indulging.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE TRACK OF THE MOCCASIN.

The blue dawn of morning was glinting among the rocks when I awoke. On the crest of the cliff was a streak of amber-coloured light, that betokened the rising of the sun, and warned me, that it was time to be stirring.

I had no toilet to make—no breakfast to eat: nothing to do but mount my horse and move onward.

I continued up the lateral ravine—since there was no path leading out from it; and to return to the Huerfano, would have been to ride back into the teeth of danger.

I still felt faint. Though less than twenty-

four hours since I had eaten, I hungered acutely. Was there nothing I could eat?

I looked inquiringly around.

It was a scene of sterility and starvation. Not a symptom of life—scarcely a sign of vegetation! Rocks, bare and forbidding, formed two parallel façades grinning at each other across the gorge—their rugged features but little relieved by the mottling of dark junipers that clung from their clefts. There appeared neither root nor fruit that might be eaten. Only a chameleon could maintain existence in such a spot!

I had scarcely made this reflection, when, as if to contradict it, the form of a noble animal became outlined before my eyes. Its colour, size, and proportions were those of a stag of the red deer species; but its spiral horns proclaimed it of a different genus. These enabled me to identify it as the rare mountain-ram—the magnificent *ammon* of the Northern Andes.

It was standing upon a salient point of the cliff—its form boldly projected against the

purple sky, in an attitude fixed and statuesque. One might have fancied it placed there for embellishment—a characteristic feature of that wild landscape. The scene would have been incomplete without it.

From my point of observation, it was five hundred yards distant. It would have been equally safe at five: since I had no means of destroying it. I might easily have crept within shot range—since a grove of cotton-woods, just commencing where I had halted, extended up the bottom of the ravine. Under these, I could have stalked to the base of the cliff on which the animal stood—a sort of angular promontory projecting into the gorge.

This advantage only rendered the sight more tantalising: my gun was empty, and I had no means of reloading it.

Was it certain the piece was empty? Why should the Indian have believed it to be loaded? Up to this moment, I had not thought of examining it.

I drew the ramrod, and inverted it into the barrel. The head struck upon a soft sub-

stance. The screw stood four fingers above the muzzle: the gun was charged!

There was no cap upon the nipple. There had been none!

This accounted for the piece having missed fire. In all likelihood, I owed my life to the circumstance of the savage being ignorant of the percussion principle!

I was now indebted to another circumstance for a supply of caps. The locker near the heel of the stock had escaped the attention of the Indians. Its brass cover had passed for a thing of ornament. On springing it open, the little caps of corrugated copper gleamed before my eyes—an abundance of them.

I tapped the powder into the nipple; adjusted a cap; and, dismounting, set forth upon the stalk.

The spreading tops of the cotton-woods concealed me; and, crouching under them, I made my approaches as rapidly as the nature of the ground would permit.

It grew damper as I advanced; and, presently, I passed pools of water and patches of

smooth mud—where water had recently lain. It was the bed of an intermittent stream—a hydrographic phenomenon of frequent occurrence in the central regions of North America. The presence of water accounted for that of the cotton-wood trees—a sure indication of moisture in the soil.

The water was a welcome sight. I was suffering from thirst, even more than from hunger; and, notwithstanding the risk of losing my chance of a shot, I determined to stop and drink.

I was creeping forward to the edge of one of the ponds, when a sight came under my eyes that astonished me; and to such a degree, as to drive both thirst and hunger out of my thoughts—at least for the moment.

In the margin of sandy mud extending along the edge of the water, appeared a line of tracks—the tracks of human feet!

On crawling nearer, I perceived that they were moccasin-tracks, but of such tiny dimensions, as to leave no doubt as to the sex of

the individual who had made them. Clearly, they were the imprints of a woman's feet!

A woman must have passed that way? An Indian woman of course?

This was my first reflection; and almost simultaneous with it arose another half-interrogative conjecture: was it Su-wa-nee?

No. The foot was too small for that of the forest-maiden. I had a remembrance of the dimensions of hers.

The tracks before my eyes were not over eight inches in length; and could only have been made by a foot slender, and of elegant shape. The imprint was perfect; and its clear outline denoted the light elastic tread of youth. It was a *young* woman who had made those footmarks.

At first, I saw no reason to doubt that the tracks were those of some Indian girl. Their size would not have contradicted the supposition. Among the aboriginal belles of America, a little foot is the rule—a large one the exception. I had tracked many a pair much smaller than those; but never had I seen the

footprints of an Indian with the *toes turned out;* and such was the peculiarity of those now before me.

This observation—which I did not make till after some time had elapsed—filled me with astonishment, and something more. It was suggestive of many and varied emotions. The girl or woman who had made these tracks could never have been strapped to an Indian cradle. She must be white!

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A RIVAL STALKER.

It was not by any conjecture that I arrived at this conclusion. I was quite confident that the footsteps were not those of a *squaw*—all inexplicable as was the contrary hypothesis.

I observed that they were very recent—of less than an hour's age. As I rose from regarding them, a new sign appeared on the same bed of sand—the footmarks of a wolf!

No—I was deceived by resemblance. On nearer examination, they were not wolf-tracks I saw; but those of a dog, and evidently a large one. These were also fresh like the woman's tracks—made doubtless at the same time.

The dog had accompanied the woman, or rather had been following her: since a little further on, where both were in the same line, his track was uppermost.

There were two special reasons why this sign should astonish me: a *white* woman in such a place, and *wearing moccasins!*

But for the style of the *chaussure*, I might have fancied that the tracks were those of some one who had strayed from the caravan. I might have connected them with *her*—ever uppermost in my thoughts. But—no. Small though they were, they were yet too large for those *mignon* feet, well remembered.

After all, I *might* be mistaken? Some dusky maiden might have passed that way, followed by her dog?

This hypothesis would have removed all mystery, had I yielded to it. I could not: it was contrary to my tracking experience. Even the dog was not Indian: the prints of his paws proclaimed him of a different race.

My perplexity did not hinder me from quenching my thirst. The pain was para-

mount; and after assuaging it, I turned my eyes once more towards the cliff.

The wild ram had not stirred from his place. The noble animal was still standing upon the summit of the rock. He had not even changed his attitude. In all likelihood, he was acting as the sentinel of a flock, that was browsing behind him.

The sun was falling fair upon his body, and deepened the fern-red colour upon his flanks. I could note his full round eyes glistening under the golden beam.

I was near enough to bring him down; and, should the rifle prove to have been properly loaded, I was likely to have for my breakfast the choicest viand of the mountain region of America.

I had raised my piece, sighted the noble game, and was about to pull trigger, when, to my astonishment, the animal sprang off from the cliff; and, turning back downward, fell heavily into the gorge!

When I saw him pitching outward from the rock, I fancied he was making one of

those singular somersaults, frequently practised by the *ovis ammon* in descending the ledges of a cliff. But no. Had the descent been a voluntary one, he would have come down upon his huge elastic horns, instead of falling as he had done, with the dull sodden sound of a lifeless body?

I perceived that the bighorn had ceased to live; and the report of a gun—that rang through the gorge, and was still reverberating from the cliffs—told the cause of his death. Some hunter, stalking on the other side, had taken the start of me!

White or red? Which fired the shot?

If an Indian, my head would be in as much danger of losing its skin as the sheep. If a white man, I might still hope for a breakfast of broiled mutton. Even a churl might be expected to share with a starving man; but it was not the quarter in which to encounter a Christian of that kidney.

It was the crack of a rifle. The red man rarely hunts with the rifle. The arrow is his favourite weapon for game.

Notwithstanding the remoteness from civilisation, the probabilities were that the hunter was white. He might be one of those attached to the caravan; or, more likely, a *free* trapper. I knew that upon several head tributaries of the Arkansas there were settlements of these singular men.

From prudential considerations, I kept my place. Screened by the cotton-woods, I should have an opportunity of deciding the point, without my presence being suspected. If the hunter should prove to be an Indian, I could still retreat to my horse without being observed.

I had not long to wait. I heard a noise, as of some one making way through the bushes. The moment after, a huge wolf-like animal rushed round the projecting angle of the cliff, and sprang upon the carcase of the bighorn.

At the same instant a voice reached my ears—'Off there, Wolf! off, villain dog! Don't you see that the creature is killed—no thanks to you, sirrah?

Good heavens! it was the voice of a woman!

While I was yet quivering under the surprise produced by the silvery tones, the speaker appeared before my eyes—a girl majestically beautiful.

A face smooth-skinned, with a tinge of golden brown—cheeks of purplish red—a nose slightly aquiline, with nostrils of spiral curve—eyes like those of the Egyptian antelope—a forehead white and high, above bounded by a band of shining black hair, and surmounted by a coronet of scarlet plumes—such was the head that I saw rising above the green frondage of the cotton-woods!

The body was yet hidden behind the leaves; but the girl just then stepped from out the bushes, and her whole form was exhibited to my view—equally striking and picturesque.

I need not say that it was of perfect shape—bust, body, and limbs all symmetrical. A face like that described could not belong to an ungainly form. When nature designs beauty, it is rare that she does her work by

halves. Unlike the artists of the anatomic school, she makes the model for herself—hence the perfect correspondence of its parts.

And perhaps fairer form had nature never conceived. The dullest sculptor might have been inspired by its contemplation.

The costume of the girl corresponded to the cast of her features. About both there was that air of wild picturesqueness, which we observe in art paintings of the gipsy, and sometimes in the gipsy herself—for those sirens of the green lanes have not all disappeared; and, but that I saw the snowy cone of Pike's Peak rising over the crest of the cliff, I might have fancied myself in the Sierra Asturias, with a beautiful *gitana* standing before me.

The soft fawn-skin *tilma*, with its gaudy broidering of beads and stained quills—the fringed skirt and buskined ankles—the striped Navajo blanket slung scarf-like over her shoulders—all presented a true gipsy appearance.

The plumed circlet upon the head wa

more typical of Transatlantic costume; and the rifle carried by a female hand was still another idiosyncracy of America.

It was from that rifle the report had proceeded, as also the bullet, that had laid low the bighorn!

It was not a *hunter* then who had killed the game; but she who stood before me—a huntress—the WILD HUNTRESS.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE WILD HUNTRESS.

No longer was it from fear that I held back; but a hesitancy springing from surprise mingled with admiration. The sight of so much beauty—grand as unexpected—was enough to unnerve one, especially in such a place—and one to whose eye the female form had so long been a stranger. Su-wa-nee's I had seen only at a distance; and hers, to my sight, was no longer beautiful.

I hesitated to show myself—lest the sight of me should alarm this lovely apparition, and cause her to take flight. The thought was not unnatural—since the tricoloured pigments of black, red, and white were still upon my

skin; and I must have presented the picture of a chimneysweep with a dining-plate glued upon his breast.

In such guise I knew that I must cut a ludicrous figure, and would have slipped back to the pool, and washed myself; but I dreaded to take my eyes from that beautiful vision, lest I might never look upon it again! In my absence, she would be gone? I feared even then, that on seeing me she might take flight; and I was too faint to follow her.

For this reason, I stood silently gazing through my leafy covert, like one who watches the movements of some shy and beautiful bird. I almost dreaded to breathe lest the sound might alarm her. I was planning, at the same time, how I should initiate an interview.

Her voice again reached me, as she recommenced scolding the dog: even its chiding tones were sweet.

She had approached, and stooped for a moment over the bighorn, as if to satisfy herself that the animal was dead. Her canine

companion did not appear to be quite sure of the fact: for he continued to spring repeatedly upon the carcass with open mouth, as if eager to devour it.

'Off, off!' cried she, threatening the dog with the butt of her rifle. 'You wicked Wolf! what has got into you? Have I not told you that the thing is dead—what more do you want? Mind, sirrah!' continued she, shaking her finger significantly at the dog—'mind, my good fellow! *you* had no part in the killing of it; and if you spoil the skin, you shall have no share in the flesh. You hear me? Not a morsel!'

Wolf appeared to understand the hint, and retired.

Impelled by hunger, I accepted the cue:

'You will not refuse a morsel to one who is starving?'

'Aha! who speaks?' cried the huntress, turning round with a glance rather of inquiry than alarm. 'Down, Wolf!' commanded she, as the dog bounded forward with a growl. 'Down, you savage brute! Don't you hear

that some one is starving? Ha! a negro! Poor devil! where can he have come from, I wonder?'

Only my head was visible—a thick bush in front of me concealing my body. The coat of char upon my face was deceiving her.

'No, not a negro,' said I, stepping out and discovering my person—'not a negro, though I have been submitted to the treatment of one.'

'Ho! white, red, and black! Mercy on me, what a frightful harlequin! Ha, ha, ha!'

'My toilet appears to amuse you, fair huntress? I might apologise for it—since I can assure you it is not my own conception, nor is it to my taste any more than'——

'You are a white man, then?' said she, interrupting me—at the same time stepping nearer to examine me.

'I was, yesterday,' I replied, turning half round, to give her a sight of my shoulders, which the Indian artist had left untouched. 'To-day, I am as you see.'

'O heavens!' she exclaimed, suddenly

changing her manner, 'this red? It is blood! You are wounded, sir? Where is your wound?'

'In several places am I wounded; but not dangerously. They are only scratches: I have no fear of them.'

'Who gave you these wounds?'

'Indians. I have just escaped from them.'

'Indians! What Indians?'

'Arapahoes.'

'Arapahoes! Where did you encounter them?'

The question was put in a hurried manner, and in a tone that betrayed excitement.

'On the Huerfano,' I replied—'by the Orphan butte. It was the band of a chief known as the Red-Hand.'

'Ha! The Red-Hand on the Huerfano! Stranger! are you sure of this?'

The earnest voice in which the interrogatory was again put somewhat surprised me.

I answered by giving a brief and rapid detail of our capture, and subsequent treatment—without mentioning the names of my tra-

velling companions, or stating the object of our expedition. Indeed, I was not allowed time to enter into particulars. I was hurried on by interpellations from my listener—who, before I could finish the narrative of my escape, again interrupted me, exclaiming in an excited manner:

'Red-Hand in the valley of the Huerfano! news for Wa-ka-ra!'

After a pause she hastily inquired: 'How many warriors has the Red-Hand with him?'

'Nearly two hundred.'

'Not more than two hundred?'

'No—rather less, I should say.'

'It is well—— You say you have a horse?'

'My horse is at hand.'

'Bring him up, then, and come along with me!'

'But my comrades? I must follow the train, that I may be able to return and rescue them?'

'You need not, for such a purpose. There is one not far off who can aid you in that—better than the escort you speak of. If too

late to save their lives, he may avenge their deaths for you. You say the caravan passed yesterday?'

'Yesterday about noon.'

'You could not overtake it, and return in time. The Red-Hand would be gone. Besides, you cannot get from this place to the trail taken by the caravan, without going back by the cañon; and there you might meet those from whom you have escaped. You cannot cross that way: the ridge is impassable.'

As she said this, she pointed to the left—the direction which I had intended to take.

I could see through a break in the bluff a precipitous mountain spur running north and south—parallel with the ravine I had been threading. It certainly appeared impassable—trending along the sky like the escarpment of some gigantic fortress.

If this was true, there would be but little chance of my overtaking the escort in time. I had no longer a hope of being able to effect the rescue of my comrades.

The delay, no doubt, would be fatal. In all likelihood, both Wingrove and Sure-shot had ere this been sacrificed to the vengeance of the Arapahoes, freshly excited by my escape. Only from a sense of duty did I purpose returning: rather with the idea of being able to avenge their deaths.

What meant this mysterious maiden? Who possessed the power to rescue my comrades from two hundred savages—the most warlike upon the plains? Who was he that could aid me in avenging them?

'Follow me, and you shall see!' replied the huntress, in answer to my interrogatory. 'Your horse! your horse! Hasten, or we shall be too late. The Red-Hand in the valley of the Huerfano! Wa-ka-ra will rejoice at the news. Your horse! your horse!'

I hastened back for my Arab, and hurriedly led him up to the spot.

'A beautiful creature!' exclaimed she, on seeing the horse; 'no wonder you were able to ride off from your captors. Mount!'

'And you?'

'I shall go afoot. But stay! time is precious. Can your steed carry us both?'

'Undoubtedly he can.'

'Then it is better we should both ride. Half an hour is everything; and if the Red-Hand should escape—— You mount first—be quick!'

It was not the time to be squeamish—even under the glance of the loveliest eyes. Taking the robe from my shoulders, I spread it over the back of my horse; and employing a piece of the laryette as a surcingle, I bound it fast. Into the improvised saddle I mounted—the girl, from a rock, leaping upon the croup behind me.

'You, Wolf!' cried she, apostrophising the dog; 'you stay here by the game, and guard it from the *coyotes*. Remember! rascal! not a mouthful till I return. Now, stranger!' she continued, shifting closer to me, and clasping me round the waist, 'I am ready. Give your steed to the road; and spare him not, as you value the lives of your comrades. Up the ravine lies our way. Ho! onward!'

The brave horse needed no spur. He seemed to understand that speed was required of him; and, stretching at once into a gallop, carried us gaily up the gorge.

END OF VOL. II.

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